







**SOME EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
CHURCHMEN**

**GLIMPSES OF ENGLISH CHURCH LIFE IN
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

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RICHARD WATSON
FROM THE PICTURE BY G. ROMNEY, R.A.

Frontispiece

STUDIES IN CHURCH HISTORY

SOME EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY CHURCH-
MEN; GLIMPSES OF ENGLISH
CHURCH LIFE IN THE EIGH-
TEENTH CENTURY

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

SOME of the sketches in this little book have appeared during the last few years in either the *Treasury* or the *Commonwealth*. The editor of the *Treasury* has kindly permitted me to use the chapters on Newton, Bishop Porteus, Hannah More, and the latter half of that on Dr. Johnson ; whilst the chapters on Cowper and Bishop Watson are due to the courtesy of the editors of the *Commonwealth*.

These chapters, with others hitherto unpublished, are now issued in book form in the hope that they may prove something of a cordial to drooping spirits in these difficult days. The volume, in the form of biographical sketches, gives glimpses into an age of great unbelief and immorality in the world at large and of great sloth in the English Church in particular. It will answer its purpose if it brings home to any reader the fact that because the Church is Divine, she has always immense recuperative powers ; she may languish for a while, but can never die. The Church in England survived the eighteenth century, when self-complacent sloth and indifference in priests and people alike had, to all appearance, established themselves ineradicably within her bosom. Much more may we

abundantly hope for her usefulness and revival in these days when a deep spirit of penitence and an eager desire for truer service has been fanned into a burning flame in the hearts of so many of her sons and daughters.

Let us gird up our loins, and remember that the Church, by her Master's promise, can bring out of her treasure things new and old wherewith to meet the needs of each succeeding age.

SOME EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CHURCHMEN

SAMUEL JOHNSON¹

I .

Popular ignorance of Johnson and his work—Sketch of his life—His greatness seen in (a) his independence, (b) his extraordinary sanity and common sense, (c) his love of humanity—His character based upon religion—His sincerity and prayerfulness—His sense of sin and fear of death—His religious habits—His views more Catholic than those of his time—His tenderness.

THE English nation is extraordinarily ready to retain in its memory and affection the names of its great men of letters ; yet it knows astonishingly little of their lives and achievements.

Particularly is this true in the case of Dr. Johnson. Samuel Johnson, though nearly one hundred and thirty years have passed since his death, is still recognised by the English people as one of its great men ; his name is still a household word, his portraits are familiar, his witticisms repeated. Yet how many Englishmen, if asked what was Johnson's particular claim to greatness, could give an answer ?

The popular conception of Johnson, indeed, is the

¹ The writer acknowledges gratefully the help which, in writing this chapter, he has received from Mr. John Bailey's little book, *Dr. Johnson and his Circle*.

conception of one far removed from real greatness. Is it not something like this? A scowling giant, very fat and very cumbrous, very learned and very uncouth, rude and violent in conversation, drinking vast quantities of tea—and the writer of a dictionary! Where in this conception lies any ground for hero-worship, or for affectionate remembrance by a grateful nation?

It is the purpose of this chapter to try to answer that question, and to fill up, in some measure, the gaps which clearly exist in the popular conception of the great man. The popular conception, though true in some of its features, must, if Johnson were the great man that posterity claims him to be, be sadly lacking in essential truthfulness. For this uncouth giant was the greatest scholar and the greatest conversationalist of his age, incomparable alike in knowledge and in wit, a man whose charm and authority were acknowledged (and that seldom grudgingly) by all who came near him, and by the greatest intellects of the time. He was knit by bonds of affection and of deep respect to Burke the great orator, Reynolds the great painter, Goldsmith the great writer, and to a large circle of loving and admiring friends. James Boswell, his biographer, worshipped him as a dog his master. When he died, one of his friends said, "He has made a chasm which not only nothing can fill up but which nothing has a tendency to fill up. Johnson is dead; let us go to the next best. There is nobody; no man can be said to put you in mind of Johnson."

II

It is to Boswell, of course, that we owe, in what is perhaps the greatest biography written in any language, the living presentment of Johnson as a man.

Samuel Johnson was born in 1709, the son of a bookseller at Lichfield. From his father he inherited a strong tendency to melancholia, against which his whole life was a constant struggle. Whilst quite young, he was taken to Queen Anne to be touched for the king's evil, a disease which, unaffected by the royal touch, permanently disfigured his features and seriously injured his sight. All his life he was subject to convulsive twitchings and gestures, which drew public attention, and often derision, upon him. In spite of these drawbacks, he grew to immense bulk and great physical strength, combined with absolute fearlessness.

In this strange frame was one of the most vigorous intellects of the time. His great powers of memory made the acquisition of learning an easy task for him. Whilst he was still a child in petticoats, his mother once gave him a collect to learn from the Prayer Book, and leaving him to his task, went upstairs. By the time she reached the second floor, he was following her. "What's the matter?" she asked. "I can say it," he answered; and repeated it correctly, though he could not have read it through more than twice.

After passing through various schools, in which his intellectual powers were always prominent, he spent two years at home—two years into which was crammed an enormous amount of desultory reading. A typical instance of his omnivorousness is the occasion when he climbed up to a high shelf in his father's room to look for apples. He found no apples, but a volume of Petrarch, which he devoured with as much gusto as that with which he would have devoured the fruit.

By the time he went to Oxford, in his nineteenth year, as a student at Pembroke College, he was a

better scholar than some of his tutors. After undergoing great straits from poverty for two years, he was obliged by his father's death to leave Oxford without a degree. Then followed years of bitter struggle with adversity. For a few months he was usher in a school, a work for which his physical oddities made him wholly unfitted. Then he made a penurious living by various small literary tasks, such as translations and essays. In 1735, when twenty-five years of age, he married the widow of a Birmingham mercer. To this good lady—nearly double his own age, stout, florid and (to others) altogether unattractive—he was intensely devoted; and from her death in 1752 to his own, thirty years later, he devoutly cherished her memory.

After his marriage he opened a school near Lichfield; but this was a failure, though one of his few pupils became the famous David Garrick. From unsuccessful pedagogy he came to London to earn a living by his pen, and endured such privations as the half-starved journalists of those days were wont to suffer, until his life was made somewhat more bearable by regular employment for the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Amongst other hack work for this paper, he wrote short reports of debates in Parliament. In 1738 he published *London*, a satire which at once attracted public attention. In 1744 appeared his *Life of Richard Savage*, a worthless but clever ne'er-do-weel, who was fortunate in having so generous a friend as Johnson to write his biography. In 1749, another satire, the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, increased Johnson's reputation, though it added little to his purse. A tragedy, *Irene*, produced at Drury Lane in the same year, was a failure. In 1755 the great *Dictionary* was published. It was the result of immense labours during seven years, and at once placed its

author in the position of autocrat in the English literary world, a throne last occupied by Pope. In 1775 Oxford University gave him the degree of LL.D. On the accession of George III, Johnson was granted a yearly pension of £300 ; and from this time till his death he wrote but little. Constitutionally he was a man of great indolence, and seldom wrote except under the spur of sheer necessity. The story of *Rasselas* (now scarcely read, but then universally admired) was due to such a stimulus. His mother dying in 1759, he wrote the book in the evenings of a single week in order to defray the costs of her funeral.

The now famous writer found a far more congenial occupation than wielding the pen in the exercise of his brilliant conversational powers. In 1764 he was one of the founders of the Literary Club, which met weekly for supper at the Turk's Head, in Soho, and prolonged its post-prandial discussions to a late hour. Amongst its first members were Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Burke, and Goldsmith ; whilst Garrick, Fox, Gibbon, and Adam Smith were all elected during his lifetime. In this assembly of brilliant wits Johnson reigned supreme, and found full opportunity for that unceasing discussion of men and matters which to him spelt life. Johnson was, in all probability, the greatest conversationalist known to history. No man could talk better or more wisely than he on any subject at short notice or without notice. Edmund Burke, himself so brilliant a speaker, said to one who on a certain occasion complained of Johnson monopolising the conversation, "It is enough for me to have rung the bell for him." No wit, however shrewd, could hold out against his gift of merciless repartee ; and, it must be confessed, where that rapier-like weapon failed, the doctor at times

would bludgeon his opponent into silence by an almost brutal savagery. "There is no arguing with Johnson," Goldsmith once said, "for if his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt end of it."

At this time his manner of life must have left the learned doctor very little time for reading or writing. In the mornings he was visited by literary friends who seem to have regarded him as an oracle upon countless matters. After talking all the morning, he dined at a tavern, going on to a friend's house for tea, and loitering late at both places—open always to discussion with any comer on any subject.

Thirteen years after his wife's death, Johnson made the acquaintance of the Thrales. Thrale was a rich brewer, and the great man of letters struck up a lasting friendship with his clever and lively wife. For nearly twenty years their house was a second home to him; and the close friendship was only broken by an estrangement arising out of Mrs. Thrale's second marriage to an Italian of whom Johnson did not approve. In the same year as this event Johnson, now seventy-five years of age, died after months of enfeebled and broken health, and he was honoured by burial in Westminster Abbey.

III

This short description of Samuel Johnson may still leave my readers wondering what may constitute his claims to greatness; and certainly nothing in this brief record has made them clear.

The truth is that Johnson's greatness was not the greatness of great actions, but rather the greatness of character. It is in Johnson's nobility of character—not in his writings, which now are rarely read—that we

find a legacy left to his nation for which posterity owes him lasting thanks.

The predominant traits of his character were essentially those which appealed most strongly and lastingly to the good sense of Englishmen.

First of all, there was his sturdy *independence*. When a half-starving student at Oxford, he could not at one time attend public lectures because his toes peeped through his boots ; but when an anonymous friend, with well-meaning kindness, left a pair of boots outside his door, the gift was indignantly thrown away. Some years later, in order to obtain patronage for his proposed dictionary, he waited in Lord Chesterfield's ante-room (a well-known picture has made the scene familiar to us) with other applicants, until a fit of impatience made such subservience impossible for him.

The patronage was not forthcoming ; but when the great book made its appearance at last, and won immediate fame for its author, Lord Chesterfield was inclined to take for himself some of the credit of its publication. In a letter of mordant irony (which is said to have sealed for ever the doom of the current system of literary patronage) Johnson demolished this pretension.

Is not a patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached the ground encumbers him with help ? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind ; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it ; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it ; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess

obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron which Providence has enabled to do for myself.

Perhaps the most admirable part of the doctor's independence was the fact that it never precluded either the readiness to apologise for an error, or the feeling of intense gratitude towards those who really helped him. "He was a vicious dog," he once said of a Mr. Hervey who had been kind to him in his poorer days, "but very kind to me. If you call a dog Hervey, I shall love him." Of another friend he said gratefully, "He praised me at a time when praise was of value to me."

Closely allied to this independence of character, and equally agreeable to the English mind, was Johnson's extraordinary *sanity and commonsense*, combined with a stern aversion to cant or humbug. The ponderous prolixity of his style makes most of his writings unsuitable for modern taste. But nobody can read his books (and in particular, his essays) without being struck by the strong and deep wisdom and sincerity which underlie them.

It was probably this, far more than brilliancy or gift of repartee, which made him the great conversationalist of his age. He was heard always with respect and pleasure, and his occasional tyranny in conversation was gladly borne, because he was always worth hearing. Even behind his occasional brutality of speech lay a directness, a simplicity, an immense respect for knowledge and truth, which won the allegiance of his hearers. "My dear friend," he once said to Boswell, "clear your *mind* of cant. You may

talk as other people do ; you may say to a man, ‘ Sir, I am your most humble servant.’ You are *not* his most humble servant. . . . You tell a man, ‘ I am sorry you had such bad weather the last day of your journey, and were so much wet.’ You don’t care sixpence whether he is wet or dry. You may *talk* in this manner ; it is a mode of talking in society ; but don’t *think* foolishly.”

For Johnson’s own part, he did not often condescend even to this “ mode of talking in Society.” His love of exact truth led him to deprecate all exaggerated talk or sentimentality. “ When a butcher tells you that *his heart bleeds for his country*, he has, in fact, no uneasy feeling.” “ Madam,” he once said at the house of a lady who affected a belief in the equality of all men, “ I am now become a convert to your way of thinking. I am convinced that all mankind are upon an equal footing ; and to give you an unquestionable proof, madam, that I am in earnest, here is a very sensible, civil, well-behaved fellow-citizen, your foot-man. I desire that he may be allowed to sit down and dine with us.”

This hatred of cant made Johnson a terror to all loose or careless talkers. If his own love of conversational battle led him (as at times it did) to maintain an argument which in cooler moments he would hardly have defended, this was exceptional. Through his long life, it might be maintained, he neither talked nor thought nor wrote foolishly. Truthfulness and sincerity were ingrained in him. When a lady asked him how it was that in the dictionary he had wrongly defined *pastern* as the *knee* of a horse, she received, instead of the elaborate defence which she expected, the curt reply, “ Ignorance, Madam, pure ignorance.” A yet higher

quality than this sincerity is seen in Johnson's *intense love of humanity*. With passionate energy he declaimed against slavery, to the disgust of Boswell and others who thought the traffic in human beings a "very important and necessary branch of commercial interest." Not the oppressed only, but all mankind had undying interest for him. He could have said, with the Latin poet, *Humani nil alienum a me puto*. To him his fellow-men—"the great book of mankind"—were the one thing supremely interesting. To him literature and art would be a small thing compared with the human being. This was doubtless the real reason why he loved the town, and cared little for the country; it was in the town, and above all in London, that he could best mix with men. For this reason conversation was his most welcome occupation; for conversation could always deal—in his case, did always deal—with the most interesting thing in life, the problems of human joy and sorrow and thought. This love of humanity made him ever ready for new friends. "Sir," he said to a friend in the last year of his life, "I look upon every day to be lost, in which I do not make a new acquaintance." And with him acquaintanceship was always ready to pass into a warm and generous friendship which could stand stern testing.

He loved children, and was generous to beggars. If his methods of charity were not always in accordance with modern scientific principles, they were permeated with that true spirit of self-sacrificing charity without which all good deeds are nothing worth.

We are not surprised that so large a heart found it hard to be patient sometimes with frivolous complaints about trifling discomforts. Mrs. Thrale,

complaining once of the dust, was sternly rebuked. When, he said, he remembered the poor who would lack bread next winter owing to the drought, he could not bear to hear ladies grumbling for rain to lay the dust for the sake of their dresses or their complexions.

Before the many tendernesses of which we have the record (and many more we may be sure, remained unrecorded), the great man's occasional choleric outbursts and irritability of speech fall into the background, or rather they make a background against which the tenderness becomes more prominent and loveable. *Ursa Major*, a fashionable wit nicknamed him; but "he has nothing of the bear," said Goldsmith, "but the skin."

IV

To those who believe that character is formed deepest and strongest and sweetest in the school of Christ, it is no surprise to know that Johnson's character was based upon definite religion. In an age when intellectuals were sceptic, Johnson, the greatest intellectual of them all, never flinched from proclaiming his own humble belief in the saving truths of the Gospel, and in the love of God as revealed in the Incarnation and Atonement.

He seemed to have been always naturally religious minded, and though at Oxford he became careless in the matter of religion, the reading of Law's *Serious Call* brought him back to a fuller belief and a stricter practice. In his own words, "I took up Law's *Serious Call to a Holy Life*, expecting to find it a dull book (as such books generally are), and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me."

Though a strong State Churchman of the Tory type

and not without prejudices, his Churchmanship was far removed from being of a purely Erastian or formal character, and was much more spiritual than that of most of his contemporaries. Where he had prejudices, they were mostly in favour of believing more rather than of believing as little as possible, according to the fashion of the time.

The religious temper of the age may be seen in the ready acceptance, on all sides, of clerical place-hunting. The criterion of a priest's success was not his spirituality or his influence over souls, but his skill in obtaining preferments. Johnson, though not especially critical of clerical sloth (he was always somewhat charitably-minded towards the clergy) did not acquiesce in the current low conception of the priesthood, as is seen in the following conversation with an old acquaintance, who had been discussing their earlier days :—

Edwards : I wish I had continued at college.

Johnson : Why do you wish that, sir ?

Edwards : Because I think I should have had a much easier life than mine has been. I should have been a parson, and had a good living, like Bloxham and several others, and live comfortably.

Johnson : Sir, the life of a parson, of a conscientious clergyman, is not easy. I have always considered a clergyman as the father of a larger family than he is able to maintain. I would rather have Chancery suits upon my hands than the cure of souls. No, sir, I do not envy a clergyman's life as an easy life, nor do I envy the clergyman who makes it an easy life.

In the same spirit of sincerity he more than once refused to take Holy Orders, when urged to do so in order to accept a benefice offered him by a friend.

His fearlessness, and the power of his tongue, made Johnson's ordinary influence over his associates very great ; and his religious influence was no doubt correspondingly weighty. Boswell tells us how once, when *en route* for Holland, he was waiting for the boat with Johnson at Harwich, and they went to look at the church. " Johnson, whose piety was constant and fervent, sent me to my knees, saying ' Now that you are going to leave your native country, recommend yourself to the protection of your Creator and Redeemer.' "

Though the friend for many years of many men of fashion and fast living, he could claim, at the age of seventy-five, that obscenity and impiety had always been checked in his presence, and we can well believe that the claim was true. Not only his religious spirit, but also his abstemiousness, was remarkable and must have had great weight, in one of such social habits, and in an age when men of fashion and letters were habitually drunken.

To Johnson, in spite of occasional lapses into a lower standard, life was always an intensely serious matter—to be lived consciously towards God no less than towards man. In his *Prayers and Meditations* we find prayers written by him before any new undertaking or at any crisis in his life. Thus there are special prayers composed before beginning the *Rambler*, at the commencement of a new year, before beginning the second volume of the *Dictionary*, before embarking on the study of law, and before engaging in some way or other in politics ; and he was known, at absent-minded moments, to mutter prayers under his breath in the presence of company.

Underneath this seriousness lay a deep sense of sin

and personal unworthiness. The resulting penitence led him to occasional actions which seemed wholly strange to others with less depth of character. One day, at over sixty years of age, he stood bareheaded in rain in the market square of Utttoxeter for an hour on the very spot where his father used to keep a book-stall. This was an act of penance for having refused long before, in boyish pride, to mind the stall at his father's request.

It may have been this strong sense of sinfulness, working upon a mind naturally melancholy, which caused throughout life his vivid fear of death. "Oh, my friend," he once wrote, "the approach of death is very dreadful. I am afraid to think on that which I know I cannot avoid." It is surprising, perhaps, to find this fear strong in one who intellectually had so firm a grip on religious verities; but his very sense of the awfulness of the Atonement made it hard for him to feel that his frailties could find a place within its sheltering power. "The better a man is," he said, "the more afraid he is of death, having a clearer view of infinite purity." He would maintain earnestly, even passionately, that as St. Paul feared to be a castaway, so no man could be confident of his final salvation.

I never thought confidence, with respect to futurity, any part of the character of a brave, a wise, or a good man. Bravery has no place where it can avail nothing; wisdom impresses strongly the consciousness of those faults, of which it is, perhaps, itself an aggravation; and goodness, always wishing to be better, and imputing every deficiency to criminal negligence, and every fault to voluntary corruption, never dares to support the condition of

forgiveness fulfilled, nor what is wanting in the crime supplied by penitence.

This is the state of the best ; but what must be the condition of him whose heart will not suffer him to rank himself among the best, or among the good ? Such must be his dread of the approaching trial, as will leave him little attention to the opinion of those whom he is leaving for ever ; and the serenity that is not felt, it can be no virtue to feign.

Boswell once asked him, “ Is not the fear of death natural to man ? ” and Johnson answered, “ so much so, sir, that the whole of life is but keeping away the thoughts of it.” It is pleasing to know, from the prayer composed by him before receiving the Blessed Sacrament just before his death, that he was able to meet his end with composure and a full confidence in the saving power of his Redeemer.

Johnson was a regular worshipper at Church (at St. Clement Danes in particular), and observed Church seasons. Again and again Boswell mentions that the great man observed Good Friday, not only by church-going, but by some form of abstinence from food.

On the 9th of April, being Good Friday, I breakfasted with him on tea and cross-buns, *Doctor Levet*, as Frank called him, making the tea. He carried me with him to the church of St. Clement Danes, where he had his seat ; and his behaviour was, as I had imaged to myself, solemnly devout. I never shall forget the tremulous earnestness with which he pronounced the awful petition in the Litany : “ In the hour of death, and at the day of judgment, good Lord, deliver us.

We went to church both in the morning and

evening. In the interval between the two services we did not dine ; but he read in the Greek New Testament, and I turned over several of his books. Two years later Boswell says :—

On Friday, April 14th, being Good Friday, I repaired with him the morning, according to my usual custom on that day, and breakfasted with him. I observed that he fasted so very strictly, that he did not even taste bread, and took no milk with his tea.

At the age of forty-seven the Doctor wrote in his diary the following plan for the observance of his Sundays :—

Having lived not without an habitual reverence for the Sabbath, yet without that attention to its religious duties which Christianity requires :—

1. To rise early, and in order to it, to go to sleep early on Saturday.

2. To use some extraordinary devotion in the morning.

3. To examine the tenour of my life, and particularly the last week ; and to examine my advances in religion, or recession from it.

4. To read the Scripture methodically with such helps as are at hand.

5. To go to church twice.

6. To read books of Divinity, either speculative or practical.

7. To instruct my family.

8. To wear off by meditation any worldly soil contracted in the week.

The doctor's religious views were far more Catholic than those of his time. He declared vehemently that

he would face a battery of guns (and he would have done so), to restore to Convocation its ancient powers. He had an intense respect for episcopacy, and he could discuss without heat the opinions of Roman Catholics.

Boswell : So, sir, you are no great enemy to the Roman Catholic religion ?

Johnson : No more, sir, than to the Presbyterian religion.

Boswell : You are joking ?

Johnson : No, sir, I really think so. Nay, sir, of the two I prefer the Popish.

Boswell : How so, sir ?

Johnson : Why, sir, the Presbyterians have no church, no apostolical ordination.

Boswell : And do you think that absolutely essential, sir ?

Johnson : Why, sir, as it was an apostolical institution, I think it is dangerous to be without it.

He believed in the Intermediate State, as is seen both in his prayers and in his attitude towards Purgatory.

Boswell : What do you think, sir, of Purgatory, as believed by the Roman Catholics ?

Johnson : Why, sir, it is a very harmless doctrine. They are of opinion that the majority of mankind are neither so obstinately wicked as to deserve everlasting punishment, nor so good as to merit being admitted into the society of blessed spirits ; and therefore that God is graciously pleased to allow of a middle state, where they may be purified by certain degrees of suffering. You see, sir, there is nothing unreasonable in this.

Boswell : But then, sir, their masses for the dead ?

Johnson : Why, sir, if it be once established that there are souls in Purgatory, it is as proper to pray for *them*, as for brethren of mankind who are yet in this life.

Boswell : The idolatry of the Mass ?

Johnson : Sir, there is no idolatry in the Mass. They believe God to be there, and they adore him.

Boswell : The worship of saints ?

Johnson : Sir, they do not worship saints ; they invoke them ; they only ask their prayers. I am talking all this time of the *doctrines* of the Church of Rome. I grant you that in *practice* Purgatory is made a lucrative imposition, and that the people do become idolatrous as they commend themselves to the tutelary protection of particular saints. I think their giving the sacrament only in one kind is criminal, because it is contrary to the express institution of Christ, and I wonder how the Council of Trent admitted it.

Boswell : Confession ?

Johnson : Why, I don't know but that is a good thing. The scripture says, " Confess your faults one to another," and the priests confess as well as the laity. Then it must be considered that their absolution is only upon repentance, and often upon penance also. You think your sins may be forgiven without penance, upon repentance alone.

We find among Johnson's *Prayers and Meditations*, devotions for his departed wife :—

O Lord, so far as it may be lawful in me, I commend to thy fatherly goodness the soul of my departed wife, beseeching thee to grant her whatever

is best in her present state, and finally to receive her to eternal happiness.

The following touching prayer for her was found among his papers after his death :—

O Lord ! Governor of heaven and earth, in whose hands are embodied and departed Spirits, if thou hast ordained the Souls of the Dead to minister to the Living, and appointed my departed wife to have care of me, grant that I may enjoy the good effects of her attention and ministration, whether exercised by appearance, impulse, dreams, or in any other manner agreeable to Thy government. Forgive my presumption, enlighten my ignorance, and however meaner agents are employed, grant me the blessed influences of Thy Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

It will be as well, perhaps, to end this chapter with two instances to show that Johnson's religion was not of the purely intellectual or dilettante order, but was permeated with that very practical love which forgets itself in the needs of others.

On one occasion as he came home from his evening club, he found a wretched woman lying in the street, exhausted by disease and want. Lifting her tenderly, he carried her on his back to his own house, had her wants attended to, and sought to set her upon the path to virtuous living.

The second story tells, in his own words, how he bade farewell to an old family servant who lay dying :—

I desired all to withdraw, then told her that we were to part for ever, and, as Christians, we should part with prayer, and that I would, if she was willing,

say a short prayer beside her. She expressed great desire to hear me, and held up her poor hands as she lay in bed, with great fervour, while I prayed, kneeling by her, in nearly the following words . . . I then kissed her. She told me that to part was the greatest pain that she had ever felt, and that she hoped we should meet again in a better place. I expressed, with swelled eyes, and great emotion of kindness, the same hopes. We kissed and parted—I humbly hope to meet again and part no more.

In all this, then, we may be content to find the key to Johnson's greatness. The man's weaknesses were palpable enough. He had great bodily afflictions and mannerisms ; he was tempted throughout life to deep melancholy and to incessant sloth ; he was intensely choleric, and his immense intellectual powers must have tempted him to pride and arrogance. He would have been the first to acknowledge that in these ways he was " tied and bound with the chain " of his sins.

But over against these faults we find a sturdy independence of all save God and self ; a deep sense of the seriousness of life, and of personal responsibility to God ; a constant self-disciplining ; an intense love of knowledge and truth ; and a very practical and self-less tenderness towards the poor, the frail, the suffering. Such a life as this can inspire English character and thought throughout the ages ; and in every age reflection upon such a character as this will do its abundant share to raise the level of English living and English faith.

GEORGE WHITEFIELD

I

His early life—Connection with the Oxford Methodists—Ordination and first work—Work in Georgia—Outdoor preaching in England and opposition—Savannah and the Orphanage—Building of “the Tabernacle”—The Cambuslang Revival—Fashionable hearers—Whitefield’s zeal, ill-health and death—His Churchmanship—His great influence due to (*a*) his oratorical powers, (*b*) his love of souls, (*c*) his disinterestedness, (*d*) his love for Christ.

To Churchmen who long for the latent fervour of the Church to be fanned into the flame of a revival in power and the Holy Ghost, few records can be more interesting than those of the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century ; and to priests who long to play their part, however small, in rousing their flocks to a deeper intensity of belief and practice, there can be few pages of Church history more instructive than those which tell of the preaching labours of men like John Wesley and George Whitefield.

The story of John Wesley is well known—that of Whitefield far less ; yet in the early years of the movement (Wesley survived Whitefield by twenty years) it was the latter who was the predominant and more famous figure of the two.

This chapter hopes to give some account, however unworthy, of one who is marked out by his immense labours and fiery zeal for Christ as one of the most extraordinary of English religious leaders.

George Whitefield, the youngest of a family of seven, was born in 1714 at Gloucester, where his father, who had formerly been a wine merchant and was descended of clerical stock, kept the Bell Inn. Mr. Whitefield died two years after his son's birth, so that George was brought up by his mother, who found him a precocious and lively handful.

Always overflowing with intense energy and animal spirits, he was an irrepressible lad, his mischievous and lively temperament leading him continually into pranks and habits far from desirable. He would steal money from his mother's pockets, and keep for his own use payments made over the inn counter; he was eager for any kind of play and entertainment, loving cards and old romances; was irreverent in church, and would burst into the nearest Dissenting meeting-house shouting out "Old Cole! Old Cole!" at its minister. The redeeming feature of all this misdemeanour was its openness; for his spirits were too buoyant for any of his misdeeds to remain for long undetected.

And indeed this boy, with all his lack of self-restraint and his resentment of discipline, was from his earliest days an extraordinary mixture of good and evil. His stolen money he would divide between jam tarts and the poor! At times he would steal books, and they were books of devotion! He was grossly irreverent in church, yet he was always fond of playing at preaching and taking church services!

When twelve years old he was sent to the school of St. Mary de Crypt in Gloucester, "the best grammar school," he himself says, "I ever went to"—a statement which reads as if he had sampled more than one school before! Here his love of acting had full scope,

as one of the masters wrote plays and encouraged acting ; and George was generally chosen to make the annual oration before visitors.

But, though part of the pocket-money thus earned was spent upon Ken's *Manual for Winchester Scholars* and similar books, the discipline of school chafed his impetuous nature, and he persuaded his mother, when he was only fifteen, to take him away. Once removed from school, there was no opening for him but to serve as tapster at his mother's inn ; and during this occupation his strange temperament found pleasure, when he had spare time, in reading his Bible and in writing sermons. During the next two years he alternated between periods of intense religious feelings and of irreligion, until his mother and brothers must have despaired of any stability of character in him.

At the age of seventeen he received the Blessed Sacrament after much prayer and preparation, and his thoughts were more and more turned towards the course which God was preparing for him. A year later, in 1732, an opportunity offered of entering Pembroke College, Oxford, as a servitor, and he joyously embraced it. The lad who had waited on Gloucester citizens in the Bell Inn taproom for his bare subsistence found it no great hardship to wait upon Oxford students when the delights of study and the hope of some useful career were his reward.

Like another Pembroke man before him, Dr. Johnson, he was profoundly influenced by Law's *Serious Call* ; and as his earnestness of life and character grew, he was gradually drawn into the little circle of Oxford men, about fifteen in number, known as "the Methodists." In 1730 John Wesley had returned to Oxford from helping in his father's parish

of Epworth, and became known to University wits as "Father of the Holy Club." The Methodists, who were so called because they tried to live lives mapped out by religious method, received the Blessed Sacrament every Sunday at St. Mary's, and by their piety, self-denial, and charity to the poor, attracted the attention of the whole University. Whitefield's heart, at the close of 1734, was stirred with deep sympathy as he saw the little band pass to their weekly Sacrament through a crowd of ridiculing undergraduates. An opportunity soon offered of making the acquaintance of the two Wesleys, and Whitefield courageously and wholeheartedly cast in his lot with theirs.

He practised their austerities and self-mortification with great earnestness, living in Lent on coarse bread and unsweetened tea. Great mental distress followed, and a serious illness, during which a deep sense of the pardoning love of God filled his soul with joy unspeakable. To this time he dates his conversion from seeking salvation by good works to that doctrine of justification by faith which he was to preach so powerfully for many years.

Returning to Gloucester for his health's sake, he formed a small religious society there, and set to work to read the Bible regularly to the sick and poor, and to visit prisoners in the county gaol.

Dr. Benson, Bishop of Gloucester, hearing of the young man's zeal and piety, sent for him, and after an interview offered to ordain him, though he was but twenty-one. After much hesitation on his part he was ordained deacon in 1736, preaching his first sermon on the following Sunday in his native town to a crowded and attentive congregation. Already he must have shown signs of real power, for complaint

was made to the bishop that his sermon had driven fifteen people mad; to which the worthy prelate replied that he only hoped the madness might last until the following Sunday.

The young deacon gives the following account of his own ordination :—

In the evening I retired to a hill near the town, and prayed fervently for about two hours, in behalf of myself and those who were to be ordained with me. On Sunday morning I rose early, and prayed over St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy, and more particularly over that precept, " Let no one despise thy youth " ; and when the bishop laid his hands upon my head, if my vile heart doth not deceive me, I offered up my whole spirit, soul and body to the service of God's sanctuary ; and afterwards sealed the good confession I had made before many witnesses, by partaking of the holy sacrament of our Lord's most blessed body and blood.

How worthily he kept his vow we shall see.

Returning at once to Oxford, where he hoped to develop his studies, he found himself before long the acknowledged head of the Methodists in the absence of John and Charles Wesley, who had gone out to Georgia on missionary work. With their mantle of leadership also fell upon him the charge of that charity work which was so strongly marked a feature of early Methodism, and he undertook the visiting and relief of poor prisoners in the city.

The state of prisoners in English gaols at this time was truly appalling. Dickens has given us a vivid enough picture of their condition in 1830 ; and it is easily imagined that it was worse, not better, a hundred

years earlier. The misery of their state was, indeed, past all description. Owing to the reluctance of the authorities to spend money upon the prisons, they were often in a ruinous condition. Intercourse with the outside world was easy through the barred windows to which the inmates crowded for light and air. Alcohol passed freely in, plots for burglaries and other crimes were hatched between the prisoners and their dissolute friends. To prevent inmates escaping, they were sometimes chained to their bedsteads, or dragged logs or chains after them. The cells, through lack of space and ventilation, were almost "Black Holes of Calcutta." The iniquitous Window Tax was in operation, and as the gaolers had to pay this, they provided as little window as possible; earth floors (sometimes covered with an inch of water), vermin and rats, open sewers running through the cells, completed the tale of horror. Little wonder that smallpox and "gaol fever" carried off a large number of the inmates. On more than one occasion judges, aldermen and others all perished from fever caught at Assizes from prisoners in court. In the gaols—which were regarded, not as places of punishment or reformation, but simply as places of detention—there was no attempt at discipline, and gambling and immorality abounded. There was little or no attempt at classification, both sexes and all ages being huddled together, so that the young drank in wickedness from their more abandoned elders.

The early Methodists, whether at Oxford or elsewhere, could hardly have found a better field in which to prove that Christian life leads to acts of mercy and love.

In the midst of this work at Oxford, letters from the Wesleys made Whitefield long to join them in Georgia ;

but work in this sphere was not yet to be. He alternated Oxford labours with short spells of pastoral work, as *locum tenens*, at the Tower Chapel, and in the Hampshire parish of Dummer. In the latter place he had to conquer his aversion from intercourse with illiterate and ignorant folk; and here again William Law came to his help with his sketch of Ouranius, the country priest who learnt to love his rustic people through his practice of continual intercession for them. Here we find him carrying out his Methodist principles in parish work, reading the two offices daily, before and after people went to their work, catechising children daily, and visiting from house to house. He followed the division of time so often recommended in our days to young priests, allotting eight hours of each day to study and retirement, eight to meals and sleep, and eight to pastoral work.

Early in 1737 the Wesleys appealed to Whitefield to take over their work in Georgia; and the young deacon was quick to answer a call which he had already inwardly heard. During a year of waiting to sail (it was not so easy to start a long voyage then as now, unfavourable winds alone often causing tedious delays), he filled up his time with arduous preaching engagements at Bristol, Gloucester, Oxford and London. His heart was afire with love for Christ and with love for souls; and wherever he went, he stirred men's hearts to their depths. Speaking of his work in a Gloucestershire parish, he says:—

Early in the morning, at noonday, evening, and midnight, nay, all the day long, did the blessed Jesus visit and refresh my heart. Could the trees

of a certain wood near Stonehouse speak, they would tell what sweet communion I and some dear souls enjoyed with the ever-blessed God there. Sometimes, as I have been walking, my soul would make such sallies that I thought it would go out of the body. At other times I would be so overpowered with a sense of God's infinite majesty, that I would be constrained to throw myself prostrate on the ground, and offer my soul as a blank in His hands, to write on it what He pleased. One night was a night never to be forgotten. It happened to lighten exceedingly. I had been expounding to many people, and some being afraid to go home, I thought it my duty to accompany them, and improve the occasion, to stir them up to prepare for the second coming of the Son of man ; but oh ! what did my soul feel ? On my return to the parsonage-house, whilst others were rising from their beds, and frightened almost to death, to see the lightning run upon the ground, and shine from one part of the heaven to another, I and another, a poor but pious countryman, were in the field praising, praying to, and exulting in our God, and longing for that time when Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in a flame of fire ! O that my soul may be in a like frame when He shall actually come to call me !

In the cities he attracted huge congregations ; and when he reached London, the various religious societies and charity schools, finding his preaching powers reflected in the church collections, besought his aid. Nothing loth, he would at this time preach nine times a week ; on Sundays he would rise, whilst yet dark,

for an early Communion before beginning a tour of the day's preaching in neighbouring churches. "At Cripplegate, St. Anne's, and Foster Lane," he records, "O how often we have seen Jesus Christ crucified, and evidently set forth before us! On Sunday mornings, long before day, you might see streets filled with people going to church, with their lanthorns in their hands, and hear them conversing about the things of God."

At last, on January 30th, 1738, his ship sailed, and Whitefield had a three months' voyage, in which his fervour impressed the crew as much as it had influenced his hearers at home. He took with him £300 which he had collected in England for the poor of Georgia. He had also by his preaching earned £1000 for the charity schools; and money was then worth three times as much as at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Georgia was a very different sphere of work from the scenes of his English labours. It was the last American colony founded by England, and its first settlers were English debtors and gaolbirds, and convicts from Jamaica, who were joined later by a higher type of colonists, a strong Moravian element amongst them. The government was in the hands of twenty-one trustees, largely Presbyterians. Both John and Charles Wesley—one at Savannah, the other at Frederica—had failed to commend their religion to this flock; and after rousing much opposition, and even ill-feeling, they had been glad to return to England.

Whitefield, as eager as they but far less stern and uncompromising in his methods, found at first a chilly reception, but his great charity and sincerity soon won their way with the colonists. Finding little scope for

his energies in preaching to the small and scattered congregations, he began to organise the building of a home for some of the destitute and neglected orphans. Of these, owing to the high rate of mortality in the colonies, there was a great number. From this time to his death, thirty-two years later—though, like Wesley he treated the world as his parish and seldom stayed in any one place for more than a few weeks at a time—he was minister of Savannah, and the orphans were never out of his thoughts and labours.

That August he sailed again to take priest's orders in England (America, of course, in those days possessed no bishops of her own), and after a dangerous voyage found himself in December once more the centre of religious revival in London. On Christmas Eve he preached twice, held forth to two religious societies, and continued with many Methodist friends in prayer, singing, and thanksgiving until nearly four in the morning. At four he preached, and again at six, then received the Blessed Sacrament, and preached yet thrice more—no mean way of spending Christmas Day !

A fortnight later Bishop Benson ordained him priest.

Already his methods and their results were causing some heart-burning among his brother clergy. If there was one thing which the English Church of the eighteenth century dreaded and hated it was what was termed "enthusiasm," any pretence to an outpouring of the Spirit or of God's grace in any other way than the very orderly and somnolent Church ministrations of those sleepy days. But wherever Whitefield went all sleepiness and most conventionalities vanished like smoke ; and the wind, blowing

where it listed, fanned latent sparks of spiritual energy into strange and unwonted fires. Speaking, for instance, of one of these Christmas meetings, John Wesley, who attended some of them with Whitefield, says :—

About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty, we broke out with one voice, “ We praise Thee, O God ; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord ! ”

Little by little opposition to the new preacher spread, until all the London churches were closed to him. But Whitefield was not to be denied. If he could not awaken souls in churches, he would do it elsewhere ; and opposition now launched him upon that field-preaching which was to become his real life-work.

Refused permission to preach in Bristol churches, he preached out of doors for the first time on February 17th, 1739, on a hill near Bristol to the colliers of Kingswood. An enemy wrote, “ I believe the devil in hell is in you all ; Whitefield has set the town on fire, and now he is gone to kindle a flame in the country ” ; whilst the preacher’s own view is seen in his journal—“ Blessed be God that the ice is now broke, and I have now taken the field ! Some may censure me, but is there not a cause ? Pulpits are denied, and the poor colliers ready to perish for lack of knowledge.”

Soon his congregation grew from two hundred to

many thousands. As from his out-door pulpit he poured out his heart before these vast crowds of hardened colliers, tears, leaving white gutters in their track, poured down the grimy cheeks of his listeners, and conversions to repentance and a new life were abundant.

After a tour of field-preaching in Wales with similar results, he came back to London, and preached amidst intense excitement to a mighty multitude in Moorfields, and again the same evening to twenty thousand people on Kennington Common, where his solemn message must have been rendered more solemn by the creaking gallows which close by bore the remains of executed criminals.

Whitefield's biographer¹ gives a vivid account of this scene in Moorfields :—

On Sunday morning, April 29th, an "exceeding great multitude" assembled in the fields to hear him ; but to while away the time before his arrival there was a little preliminary sport in breaking to pieces a table which had been placed for his pulpit. In due time he drove up in a coach, accompanied by some friends, and with one of them on either side, attempted to force his way to the place where the table ought to have been found. His body-guard was soon detached from him, and he was left at the mercy of the congregation, which at once parted and made an open way for him to the middle of the fields, and thence—for there was no pulpit there—to the wall which divided the upper and lower fields, upon which he took his stand. It was

¹ Mr. J. P. Gledstone, from whose book many of the facts in this chapter have been drawn.

a novel sight to the preacher—that mass of London rabble—as his eye ranged over it ; it was a novel sight to the people—that young clergyman of twenty-four, in gown, bands, and cassock, as he lifted himself up before them. His tall, graceful figure ; his manly and commanding bearing ; his clear, blue eyes, that melted with tenderness and kindness ; his raised hand, which called for attention—everything about him declared a man who was capable of ruling them ; and they were willing to listen to him. When he spoke, and they heard his strong but sweet voice, exquisitely modulated to express the deepest, strongest passion, or the soberest instruction, or the most indignant remonstrance, they stood charmed and subdued. Then his message was so solemn and so gracious, something in which every one was interested for time and for eternity ; and he delivered it as if it were all real to him, as indeed it was ; as if he believed it and loved it, and wanted them also to accept it, as indeed he did. No scoffer durst raise his shout, no disturber durst meddle with his neighbour, as the thrilling text flew all around, every one hearing it, “ Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man cometh ” ; and as the preacher, with anger pointed upwards, cried, “ There shall be a day in which these heavens shall be wrapped up like a scroll—the elements melt with fervent heat—this earth and all things therein shall be burnt up, and every soul of every nation summoned to appear before the dreadful tribunal of the righteous Judge of quick and dead, to receive rewards or punishments according to the deeds done in their bodies,”

But the irregularity of such proceedings roused the bitter indignation of those to whom the maintenance of a sober decorum was of more value than the awakening of souls. Clergy who had been wholly indifferent to scenes of licentiousness and vice in their neglected parishes stirred up parishioners, often of the basest sort, to hinder and even to persecute ; and there were many who needed no stirring to such a task. Men with drums drowned the preacher's voice, threats of murder were sent to him, magistrates sent constables to forbid him hold his meetings ; innkeepers, as at Basingstoke, refused him admission, and when he found an inn which would accept him as guest, the rabble would fire rockets and squibs round his door. The Bishop of London issued a pastoral letter against him and his teaching. Even good Bishop Benson advised him kindly to preach the Gospel only to his appointed congregation ; to which Whitefield replied that he dared not decline this work, and that if the bishops cast him and his friends out, the Lord would take them up.

John Wesley at first shrank from this out-door preaching, but gradually saw its value. He joined his friend in his labours and dangers, recording in his diary his conversion to the new method. That method roused intense opposition, which Whitefield felt very keenly. " I doubt not," he says in his *Journal*, " but many self-righteous bigots, when they see me spreading out my hands to offer Jesus Christ freely to all, are ready to cry out, ' How glorious did the Rev. Mr. Whitefield look to-day, when, neglecting the dignity of a clergyman, he stood venting his enthusiastic ravings in a gown and cassock upon a common, and collecting mites from the poor people ! ' But if this

is to be vile, Lord grant that I may be more vile. I know this foolishness of preaching is made instrumental to the conversion and edification of numbers. Ye scoffers, mock on ; I rejoice, and will rejoice." At every meeting a collection was taken for his beloved orphans.

A year after he had sailed from America Whitefield set sail back to his colony, taking with him a small family of twelve converts and children. The ship's provisions having run out, as frequently happened in those days when foul weather might hold up a vessel for weeks or even months, he was landed at Lewis Town, one hundred and fifty miles from the Quaker town of Philadelphia. Riding hither, he received a kindly welcome from its inhabitants—Benjamin Franklin among them—and from the clergy of all denominations, who allowed him to preach wherever he would. From here he made his way to New York, where he had a cooler welcome and some opposition.

But even here he aroused many apathetic and careless ministers of all denominations to a sense of sloth and inefficiency in their high calling. Some resented his burning words of warning and protest ; and indeed at this time he seems to have been, for one so young, somewhat peremptory and censorious, denouncing " Pharisee-teachers " in scathing terms. But others were moved to new efforts to win their flocks to Christ ; and the vast crowds of people who attended his daily preaching were deeply moved.

Back at Savannah at last, he built his longed-for orphanage, housing forty children on a farm settlement which partly provided their food and sustenance.¹

¹ Later we find him buying slaves for this farm—a strange inconsistency with his impassioned declarations of God's love for all men. But he had clearly never thought out the slavery question.

At this time a breach in his friendship with John Wesley began through Whitefield's growing adhesion to Calvinistic tenets. There is no space here to enter into the merits and demerits of the dispute. Both men showed some self-assertiveness, and perhaps not too much charity. It has been wittily said that the controversy, which took the form of lengthy correspondence between the two friends, might be summed up as follows :—

DEAR GEORGE,—I have read what you have written on the subject of predestination, and God has taught me to see that you are wrong and that I am right.—Yours affectionately,

J. WESLEY.

DEAR JOHN,—I have read what you have written on the subject of predestination, and God has taught me that I am right and you are wrong.—Yours affectionately,

G. WHITEFIELD.

But if there was stubbornness on both sides, the quarrel was a real sorrow to the affectionate hearts of both the disputants, and they were unfeignedly glad to be reconciled a few years later.

Whitefield's next visit to England (always on behalf of his beloved orphans) was in 1741, when, finding all pulpits—even that of the Wesleys—closed to him, he erected a wooden building, "the Tabernacle," in Moorfields, to accommodate his hearers. This, the precursor of the present building, was made a permanent edifice twelve years later.

During this stay in England he married a widow, some years older than himself, who—poor thing!—



WHITEFIELD PREACHING IN CORNWALL
FROM AN OLD PRINT

during her married life saw but little of her husband, for his zeal for missionary touring nowise abated. In June, 1742, he paid a visit to Scotland, where marvellous scenes attended his ministry in spite of bitter opposition from the Associate Presbytery, a sect which had tried, and failed, to commit him to their tenets.

On the south side of the Clyde, about five miles from Glasgow, and now a suburb of the city, stood a village called Cambuslang. Its minister was a man of learning and piety, who had followed Whitefield's revival in England with deep interest, and was wont to gather his own flock for worship and exhortation on a grassy level in a deep ravine near his kirk. Before Whitefield visited the place, a revival was already going on under its own minister, and hundreds were gathering for a daily sermon and to enquire about religion. Sometimes the congregation numbered nine to ten thousand from all the neighbouring district, and ministers from far and near came to help.

When, therefore, Whitefield arrived one Tuesday he found prepared soil. Thousands listened to him that day—at noon, at six, and at nine. Strange manifestations broke out among his hearers. Loud weeping sometimes drowned the preacher's voice; men and women fell to the ground as if shot, and swooning or in agonised suffering were carried by helpers into the house. Many walked the fields all night singing and praying. On Friday Whitefield preached to twenty thousand people. The next Sunday was the Presbyterian Sacrament Day. Two large tents were erected, with Communion tables, in the glen; and ministers came from all round the district to serve them. All through the day preaching

and sacrament continued ; and at the end Whitefield preached for an hour and a half to an unwearied audience of twenty thousand. Some days later between thirty and forty thousand were assembled, and three thousand communicated, whilst in the evening heavy rain did not prevent him from preaching in the open, nor the congregation from standing to listen.

Though few would resent Whitefield's fellowship with Presbyterians, the outward manifestations which accompanied the hearing of his sermons caused great scandal and disgust (and indeed might well cause great uneasiness) to orthodox and sedate Churchmen. Whitefield himself described them thus on one occasion :—

Oh, what strong crying and tears were shed and poured forth after the dear Lord Jesus ! Some fainted, and when they had got a little strength, would hear and faint again. Others cried out in a manner almost as if they were in the sharpest agonies of death. And after I had finished my last discourse, I myself was so overpowered with a sense of God's love that it almost took away my life. . . . Oh, Lord, was ever love like Thine ?

And on the following day :—

Look where I would, most were drowned in tears. The word was sharper than a two-edged sword, and their bitter cries and groans were enough to pierce the hardest heart. Oh ! what different visages were there to be seen. Some were struck pale as death, others were wringing their hands, others lying on the ground, others sinking into the arms

of their friends, and most lifting up their eyes towards heaven, and crying out to God for mercy ! I could think of nothing, when I looked upon them, so much as the great day. They seemed like persons awakened by the last trump, and coming out of the graves of judgment.

When bishops argued against this “enthusiasm,” he urged that at least it showed more of the stirring of the Holy Spirit in men’s hearts than was seen in the deadly dullness of the conventional worship of the time.

His answers to his detractors were, indeed, sometimes unanswerable. When, for instance, in later years six students of St. Edmund’s Hall, Oxford, were expelled from the University for sharing in Methodist worship, he could with no little pungency ask the Vice-Chancellor whether, if men were expelled for extempore preaching, Oxford might not benefit by a few expulsions for extempore swearing, a fault not unknown in the University. Was the sound of Psalm-singing, he asked, so much more deleterious to the University than the rattle of the dice-box, which passed wholly uncensured by those in authority ?

Returning to London from Scotland for the winter, Whitefield found people of fashion beginning to frequent the Tabernacle, including the Duchess of Marlborough, the Earl and Countess of Huntingdon, and even the Duke of Cumberland—the “hero of Culloden”—and the Prince of Wales. The preacher did not mince matters for his fine hearers ; and though he did not convert many of them, they admired his courage and sincerity, and were doubtless influenced more than they would have acknowledged, except

some who took umbrage at his plain speaking. One of these latter, the Duchess of Buckingham, wrote thus to Lady Huntingdon about Methodist doctrines:—

I thank your ladyship for the information concerning Methodist preachers ; their doctrines are most repulsive, and strongly tinged with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks, and do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting ; and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.

Another lady, the Countess of Suffolk, hearing him preach against sinners in Lady Huntingdon's drawing-room, took it as a personal insult to herself, and roundly abused her hostess and the preacher before the distinguished audience ; and she never forgave what she took to be a deliberate insult to herself.

Many doubtless attended these services out of curiosity and in a purely critical spirit. In Lady Huntingdon's chapel at Bath a space—wittily nicknamed " Nicodemus's Corner "—was curtained off near the door, so that bishops and other distinguished Churchmen could be present unobserved, to hear sermons so much livelier than their own !

On his next visit to England (he crossed the Atlantic some dozen times in all) he was appointed one of this lady's chaplains, and had the support of her favour and immense wealth. She was largely responsible for

his fashionable hearers, and used to invite all her friends to hear him. Bishop Benson came once to remonstrate with her ; but his listener, so far from patiently hearing him dilate upon her duties, urged him roundly to a greater zeal in his own ; and when he was going away, a little ruffled in temper, and regretting that he had ever ordained her protégé, she said, " My Lord ! mark my words : when you are on your dying bed, that will be one of the few ordinations you will reflect upon with complacency." Her words were justified ; for when he lay a-dying, the good prelate sent Whitefield ten guineas for his orphanage, and begged to be remembered in his prayers.

For the most part the bishops turned all their heavy artillery of pamphlets, pastoral letters, and sermons against him and his doctrines ; and the mob often followed up these politer arguments with cudgels or stones. At Exeter he was felled by a heavy stone ; the Moorfields fair-players pelted him with refuse ; in Long Acre Chapel enemies stoned his windows ; in Ireland he was once stoned, after preaching, till " all over a gore of blood."

But nothing could daunt him—neither these persecutions nor the constant ill-health which his immense labours began to bring upon him. Both in England and in America he suffered terribly at times from intense weakness, prostration, and colic. Later, he suffered from corpulency and asthma. But for all complaints he had but one remedy—and that remedy was *more preaching* ! Once at New York his death was expected, and friends from Boston came to nurse or bury him. They found him in the pulpit ! This was followed by a relapse, and he lay in agony, unable to fulfil a preaching engagement for which he was

booked. Suddenly, as the hour of service drew nigh, he said, "Doctor, my pains are suspended; by the help of God I'll go and preach, and then come home and die." And preach he did, as pale as death, all the more effectually because both he and his congregation thought the words his last. He was not to die then, however; and the same process was repeated more than once.

Whitefield's zeal made him impatient of all ecclesiastical discipline or restraint. To him, as to Wesley, the world was a parish; and one of his most vigorous sermons defends his position on the grounds that the priest is ordained "to go forth and seek after the children of God that are dispersed in this naughty world." We cannot but admire the intense love of men which urged him to his labours, and made him impatient with the Church's refusal to leave its stereotyped and inefficient methods; but, of course, it must have made it very difficult for those in authority and for his brother clergy.

The truth was, his Churchmanship was of the loosest kind, and was purely incidental to his career. All through his activities he worked with absolute impartiality with any sect that would welcome him. And though he often proclaimed his adhesion to the Church, and never actually left her, he was practically an Independent minister, who took a licence as a Dissenter, was a Calvinist in doctrine, and at his own request was buried in a Presbyterian church; whilst his labours immensely strengthened not only the Evangelical section of the Church, but still more Scotch Presbyterianism and Welsh Calvinism.

There is no space here to enlarge further upon the great field-preacher's labours. Suffice it to say that he

became more and more honoured in his own colony ; built himself a second chapel in Tottenham Court Road ; travelled on horseback in the July before his death five hundred miles, with incessant preaching, in the heat of an American summer ; and died in 1770 at Newbury Port, shortly after preaching a two-hours' sermon in the fields to a large congregation. He was but fifty-six, but he was utterly worn out by his thirty-five years of incessant toil for the Master.

II

As we look back upon Whitefield's career, it is of great interest to ask what was the secret of his extraordinary influence over the vast crowds which heard him, of whom so many were not only roused to penitence and contrition, but were won from downright hostility to be his eager followers.

We naturally turn to his printed sermons to see if we can find there the answer to our question. For the most part they seem commonplace enough both in thought and diction, though possessing far more fire than most sermons of the age. But there is no doubt that they must have gained immensely in the delivery. For Whitefield was a magnificent orator. In person, in his younger days, slim and graceful, of a noble and commanding figure ; he possessed a magnificent voice (Benjamin Franklin by a practical experiment once calculated that he could be heard by thirty thousand people) ; and he had—in this his youthful love of acting must have helped—forensic gifts of a high order. Foote and Garrick used to attend his sermons to study his methods ; and the latter said that he

would give a hundred guineas to be able to say " Oh ! " as Whitefield did.

Wonderful stories are told of Whitefield's oratorical power. The hard-headed Franklin, for instance, tells how his preaching once, at least, emptied his pockets against his will :—

I happened to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the copper. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver ; and he finished so admirably, that I emptied my pocket into the collector's dish, gold and all ! At this sermon there was also one of our club who, being of my sentiments respecting the building in Georgia, and suspecting a collection might be intended, emptied his pockets before he came from home. Towards the conclusion of the discourse, however, he felt a strong inclination to give, and applied to a neighbour who stood near him to lend him some money for the purpose. The request was made, perhaps, to the only man in the company who had the firmness not to be affected by the preacher. His answer was : " At any other time, friend Hopkinson, I would lend thee freely ; but not now, for thee seems to me to be out of thy right senses."

Whitefield's acting and diction, indeed, carried his audience away with him. Few preachers could have done what he did in depicting the repentance of

St. Peter, and cover his eyes with the fold of his gown. Hume declared him the most ingenious preacher of the time and worth going twenty miles to hear. Even Lord Chesterfield, polished man of the world and rake as he was, was once swept off his feet by the preacher's eloquence. Whitefield, in describing the danger of unrepentant sinners, pictures a night-scene where an old blind man, deserted by his dog, stumbled along the edge of a precipice. With his stick he tries to find his way. Step by step, facing the cliff, he goes forward, his foot hovers on the edge. Chesterfield, in anguish, leapt forward with the cry "Good God! he is gone!" On another occasion Whitefield was preaching to New York seamen of the dangers of the soul's voyage upon the sea of life. "Well, my boys," he said, "we have a clear sky, and are making fine headway over a smooth sea, before a light breeze, and we shall soon lose sight of land. But what means this sudden lowering of the heavens, and that dark cloud rising from beneath the western horizon? Hark! don't you hear distant thunder? Don't you see those flashes of lightning? There is a storm gathering. Every man to his duty! How the waves arise and dash against the ship! The air is dark! The tempest rages! Our masts are gone! The ship is on her beam ends! What next?" Whereupon the sailors leapt to their feet with a great shout "Take to the long boat!"

Every incident or accident during his preaching was turned to account. A man had seated himself in a church tower to hear the preacher, and Whitefield cried, "Man, I have a word for thee!" When we remember that in those days it was an amazing thing for a preacher not to use manuscript, and that the usual sermon was of the most tedious and somnolent descrip-

tion, we can imagine how this preacher stirred the hearts of his hearers like leaves in the wind.

Not least among the weapons of his oratorical armoury was his vivid teaching upon death. To the Evangelical and Calvinist of the time the stroke of death was the end of all hope for the sinner. Canon Overton says that a morbid horror of death and a fondness for dwelling upon the details of death-beds was a marked and sad feature of the Evangelical revival. Whitefield certainly used all his oratorical power to bring home to his hearers the solemnity of death ; and adventitious events were not slow to aid him. On one occasion after long silent prayer he began his sermon with the solemn text, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." A sudden shriek arose from the crowd ; and Grimshaw, in whose parish the scene took place, announced, in the awe-struck silence that followed, that one in the multitude had suddenly died. Again the text was announced ; once more a heart-rending shriek was heard ; yet a second hearer had passed into eternity. We can imagine the immense power with which under such circumstances such a preacher as Whitefield urged upon his hearers the danger of an unconverted life.

There was more than oratory, too, in his sermons. Through them always pulsated a passionate love of souls. "O my dear brethren !" he wrote once in an appeal to fellow-ministers, "have compassion on our dear Lord's Church, which He has purchased with His own blood ; and let them not perish for lack of knowledge." At the close of a sermon he would sometimes say, "I am going now to put on my condemning cap. Sinner, I must do it ; I must pronounce sentence upon you." Then would come, like a peal of thunder, the

awful curse, "Depart from Me, ye curséd, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." This was acting, doubtless ; but his biographer tells us that as he spoke the words, his eyes would be full of tears and his heart strained with compassion. It was a common thing for him to break into strong sobbing as he launched his appeals, moved to heart-breaking by the solemn sight of the thousands spread before his gaze under God's sky.

This love of humanity leaps at you as you read the written word of his sermons ; much more intensely must it have vibrated from the lips of the speaking man. "Oh ! do not turn a deaf ear to me," he would plead in his earlier days, "do not reject the message on account of the meanness of the messenger ! I am a child, a youth of uncircumcised lips, but the Lord hath chosen me that the glory might be all His own. Had He sent to invite you by a learned Rabbi, you might have been tempted to think the man had done something. But now God has sent a child that cannot speak, that the excellency of the power may be seen to be not of man, but of God."

Moreover, with Whitefield's love of souls went a great disinterestedness in the matter of money (he often refused rich gifts or preferment), and a great charity and humility. If on occasion in his earlier years he showed some censoriousness, he had a beautiful charity, arising from his own spirit of deep penitence, towards his persecutors and detractors, caring far more for winning souls than for attacking disputants. Through his long career he became too familiar with contempt and scorn to value overmuch the applause of men ; and he was generous in a ready acknowledgment of his mistakes and faults.

Above all—and here doubtless lay his chief power—he had a real and passionate love for his Master. There are passages in his sermons, in keeping with the tenor of his whole life and character, which forcibly remind one of that pure love for Jesus which burnt in such ardent souls as St. Francis of Assisi or the Curé d'Ars. "I care not," he said to a friend—and the saying was true—"if the name of George Whitefield be banished out of the word, so that Jesus be exalted in it." "Jesus," he said, referring to some tempting offers which he had refused, "Jesus it was Who kept me from catching at the golden bait." Ever in his sermons he was faithful to his one great theme, the Saviour's redeeming love for sinners. To him all the Scriptures pointed to our Lord, and he was never tired of telling his hearers so. In his famous sermon upon Abraham offering Isaac, he draws his hearer's tears by his vivid portrayal of the aged father's anguish as he stands at the altar; and then he continues:—

Do you admire Isaac so freely consenting to die, though a creature, and therefore obliged to go when God called? O do not forget to admire infinitely more the dear Lord Jesus, that promised seed, who willingly said, "Lo, I come," though under no obligation so to do, "to do thy will," to obey and die for men, "O God!" Did you weep just now, when I bid you fancy you saw the altar, and the wood laid in order, and Isaac laid bound upon the altar? Look, by faith, behold the blessed Jesus, our all-glorious Emmanuel, not bound, but nailed on an accursed tree: see how He hangs crowned with thorns, and had in derision of all that are

round about Him : see how the thorns pierce Him, and how the blood in purple streams trickle down His sacred temples ! Hark how the God of nature groans ! See how He bows His head, and at length humanity gives up the ghost ! Isaac is saved, but Jesus, the God of Isaac, dies : a ram is offered up in Isaac's room, but Jesus has no substitute ; Jesus must bleed, Jesus must die ; God the Father provided this Lamb for Himself from all eternity. He must be offered in time, or man must be damned for evermore. And now, where are your tears ? Shall I say, refrain your voice from weeping ? No, rather let me exhort you to look to Him whom you have pierced, and mourn, as a woman mourneth for her firstborn : for we have been the betrayers, we have been the murderers, of this Lord of glory ; and shall we not bewail those sins which brought the blessed Jesus to the accursed tree ? Having so much done, so much suffered for us, so much forgiven, shall we not love much ? O ! let us love Him with all our hearts, and minds, and strength, and glorify Him in our souls and bodies, for they are His.

It was love for our Lord which urged Whitefield, like St. Paul, through his perils of waters, of robbers, by his own countrymen, by the heathen, in the wilderness, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings, hunger and thirst. And real love for Jesus is the really communicable thing, which spreads irresistibly from soul to soul. Christianity is so faulty just because, whilst religion, or rather religiousness, is common enough, this love for Jesus in any real intensity is so seldom found in religious people.

Love for the Redeemer, whether in the hearts of priests or friars or humble men and women, is that which alone will redeem the world. Dr. Glover, in the *Jesus of History*, points out that whenever the Church, or a section of it, has laid high emphasis upon the living Person of Jesus Christ, an increase of power has resulted for Church or community or individual. This was the secret of St. Paul's power, of Luther's, of John Wesley's. This, he says, "is the most striking and outstanding fact in history."

The great need of the English Church to-day is surely this, that there may be in her an ever-growing band of those whose hearts the Lord has touched, whose one intense desire and hope is to use their earthly lives as pure channels through which His redeeming love may pass into the lives of others to do their Saviour glory and to win Him praise.

JOHN WESLEY

I

His greatness—His parents and home training—Charterhouse and Oxford—Ordination and College Fellowship—Epworth—The "Holy Club"—Work in Georgia—The Moravians and their influence—In England with the "Societies"—Outdoor preaching undertaken—The ignorance and immorality of the English people—The sloth of the clergy—Wesley's lay-preachers and "ordinations" arising out of the needs of the times—"Manifestations" at his preaching and opposition—Wesley's various organisations for confirming the newly-awakened—His immense labours—Marriage—Clerical helpers—His death—Wesley's Churchmanship—Modern Methodism.

THERE is no doubt as to the greatness of John Wesley. Long before the end of his long ministry he lived down by force of character and spiritual power the bitter antagonism which his first labours had aroused and which would have overwhelmed a lesser man. And to-day, one hundred and thirty years after his death, few names in English history are more universally honoured and revered. He is alike one of our greatest Churchmen and one of our greatest Englishmen; and Englishmen of any creed or generation may draw ennobling inspiration from the greatness and nobility of his character and work for God. England to-day is a far different country from what she would have been had Wesley never lived.

The field-preaching which brought him fame was really but the extension of the pioneer work which George Whitefield had begun. But Wesley was a greater man than Whitefield. He was greater, not

only in that immense virility which enabled him to continue his labours until the age of eighty-eight, whilst Whitefield was worn out at fifty-six, but also in that power of masterly organisation which stamped his labours with a greater permanency.

John Wesley, like many another great man, owed much of his greatness to his home upbringing. His father, Samuel Wesley, who was Rector of Epworth, in Lincolnshire, was a parish priest of exemplary conduct and strong character, and was possessed, moreover, of a very open mind towards new ventures and methods in work for Christ. When John and his Oxford friends were scoffed at for their frequent Communions and works of mercy, he wrote to his father asking for his advice and approval. The good old man answered thus :—

As to your designs and employments, what can I say less of them than *valde probo* : and that I have the highest reason to bless God, that He has given me two sons together at Oxford to whom He has given grace and courage to turn the war against the world and the devil, which is the best way to conquer them. They have but one more enemy to combat with, the flesh ; which if they take care to subdue with fasting and prayer, there will be no more for them to do but to proceed steadily in the same course, and expect the crown which fadeth not away. . . . I think I must adopt Mr. M. to be my son, together with you and your brother Charles ; and when I have such a ternion to prosecute that war, wherein I am now *miles emeritus*, I shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Mrs. Samuel Wesley, like her husband, was a convert from Puritan tradition to definite Church principles, and was a woman of high culture, strong character and Christian life. To the piety of these Christian parents was added, for the young Wesleys, the training of a spare diet and a rural upbringing.

John (to give him his full name, John Benjamin) was born in 1703, a year made memorable by the greatest storm, as far as records show, which ever visited England. His early home life at Epworth was not without incident, including ghostly rappings which frequently disturbed the rectory household, and a fire which destroyed the house. Little John was barely saved from the flames, and described himself in after years as "a brand from the burning." From his Lincolnshire village he was sent, at ten years of age, to school at Charterhouse, where he grew vigorous in mind and body under a regime of daily exercise, scant food, and a good classical education.

At the age of seventeen he went up to Christ Church, Oxford. Whilst he was at the University, his father put before him the desirability of taking Holy Orders; and after some hesitation and a course of theological reading, in which the *Imitatio Christi* and Jeremy Taylor's writings influenced him greatly, John was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Oxford in 1725.

Six months later he was elected Fellow of Lincoln College, and until the summer of 1727, when he left Oxford for two years to help his aged father in his parishes of Epworth and Wroote, he was busy studying and lecturing to pupils. He was urgently recalled by the Rector of his college in 1729; and although it was discussed whether he ought, for his father's sake, to seek the Epworth living, his father died before this

could have been effected, and John stayed on at Oxford.

When he returned to the University from Epworth, in 1729, he found established there a little club, mostly of undergraduates and including his brother Charles, for promoting godly life and mutual help in spiritual matters. The "Holy Club," as it was nicknamed, met daily to read classics, and on Sundays to read divinity. Its members received the Blessed Sacrament together each Sunday, and undertook works of mercy in visiting the sick and those in prison. Such societies were fairly common in those days,¹ but doubtless rare enough, if existent at all, among undergraduates; and when the numbers of the Holy Club grew to twenty-five or thirty and so became conspicuous, the little band of Oxford "Methodists" (that is, men who lived by strict method) became the object of much derision and even persecution. They were mocked on their way to the Sacrament, and the University authorities did their utmost to discourage this strange "enthusiasm" which led men scrupulously to keep all the fasts of the Church, including every Wednesday and Friday, to communicate each Sunday and festival, to visit the ignorant and degraded whom others were glad to ignore, and to practise real austerity and self-denial in food and clothes in order to give away in charity. John Wesley, on returning to Oxford, was marked out by his piety, his position and his strength of character, to become the leader of this group of

¹ The S.P.C.K. is one of these societies which has survived from the end of the seventeenth century. Its early journals contained many letters from correspondents upon religious work in different parts of the country; and amongst the correspondents is found the Rev. Samuel Wesley, John's father.

earnest men, and he acted as such until his departure for work in America in 1735.

In that year he and his brother Charles went out to the new colony of Georgia—John as a missionary under the auspices of S.P.G., and Charles as the secretary of General Oglethorpe. They both hoped that opportunities would be given them for evangelising the native Indians; but they found that their work was to minister to the settlers, chiefly at Savannah, the capital of the colony. Want of tact, and his efforts to enforce the Prayer Book rubrics (and, indeed, to enforce more than the Prayer Book justified) embroiled John with some of the colonists; and although his ministry was not so fruitless as has sometimes been supposed, he was not sorry to turn his back on Georgia and to sail homewards in less than two years' time.

On their voyage to America the Wesleys had had for shipmates a little band of German Moravians, with whose daily piety and humility, and courage in face of a sudden storm, John was greatly impressed. He studied their discipline and doctrine, and gradually became convinced that they were the most scriptural Christians of the time. When he returned to England, he at once sought the Moravian community in London, and consorted much with one Peter Böhler, one of their leaders. Nor was he satisfied until he had paid a visit in the following year to the leader of the sect, Count Zinzendorf, in Germany, and to the Moravian colony at Herrnhuth.

Wesley, who, though a born leader of men, was all his life extraordinarily influenced by the zeal of others and extraordinarily humble in criticising their defects, was swept off his feet by the assurance with which the

Moravians taught their leading tenet of justification by faith; and this doctrine, though he afterwards weakened in his insistence upon instantaneous conversion, became the keynote of his future teaching. "I marvel," he wrote, "how I refrain from joining these men. I scarce ever see any of them but my heart burns within me. I long to be with them, and yet I am kept from them."

His connection with the Moravians brought him into great distress of mind. For many months he was burdened with a sense of heaviness and a lack of peace and joy. During this time he repeatedly, to his relations' distress, accused himself of being no Christian. "That I am not a Christian at this day," he wrote, "I as assuredly know as that Jesus is the Christ." But before long an assurance of forgiveness and acceptance came to him, and gave him a great sense of confidence and joy which never forsook him through all the trials and difficulties of the rest of his long life.

John Wesley was not a man who ever kept his feelings or any new knowledge to himself. He expected always the utmost candour in his friends, and displayed the same openness to them. Accordingly he wrote at this time to one who had been a spiritual guide to him in the past, William Law, and upbraided him with neglecting to teach him the saving doctrine of justification by faith. Law, who had not been at all impressed by his own meeting with Peter Böhler, answered vigorously. But, though some estrangement followed, it is interesting to notice that Law never took up his pungent pen publicly against Wesley, and Wesley, in later years, never ceased to recommend Law's writings to his converts and pupils,

II

Wesley at once began to take up George Whitefield's outdoor work. He had persuaded Whitefield—though the younger man needed no persuading—to take up the work which he had lately abandoned in Georgia ; and he now set himself zealously to fan the flame of personal religion in England.

He found it strongest in the various religious “societies” of London. Of these, founded for the mutual edification of their members, there seem to have been about forty in London alone. They had given eager encouragement to Whitefield when he was in London ; and they were to be the nucleus for those “United Societies” which later formed the Wesleyan body.

Wesley's first entries in his *Journal* after setting foot in England run as follows :—

Sunday, September 17th.—I began again to declare in my own country the glad tidings of salvation, preaching three times, and afterwards expounding the Holy Scripture to a large company in the Minories. On Monday I rejoiced to meet with our little Society, which now consisted of thirty-two persons. The next day I went to the condemned felons in Newgate, and offered them free salvation. In the evening I went to a Society in Bear-yard, and preached repentance and remission of sins. The next evening I spoke the truth in love at a Society in Aldersgate Street ; some contradicted at first, but not long ; so that nothing but love appeared at our parting.

Thursday, 21st.—I went to a Society in Gutter

Lane ; but I could not declare the mighty works of God there, as I did afterwards at the Savoy, in all simplicity ; and the word did not return empty.

Finding abundance of people greatly exasperated by gross misrepresentations of the word I had spoken, I went to as many of them in private as my time would permit. God gave me much love towards them all. Some were convinced they had been mistaken ; and who knoweth but God will soon return to the rest, and leave a blessing behind him ?

On *Saturday, 23rd*, I was enabled to speak strong words, both at Newgate, and at Mr. E.'s Society, and the next day at St. Anne's, and twice at St. John's, Clerkenwell ; so that I fear they will bear me there no longer.

Thus commenced that long career of incessant toil which began with edifying the devout, and, passing into an unremitting self-sacrifice to reveal the Gospel to the ignorant and degraded, did not cease till the preacher's death, fifty-three years later.

The immediate cause which led to Wesley's outdoor and itinerant labours was an appeal from Whitefield, who had returned to England for ordination to priest's orders, to take a share in that fiery prophet's work at Bristol. This is how Wesley speaks in his *Journal* of this new venture on his part :—

Saturday, March 31st, in the evening I reached Bristol, and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday ; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to

decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church.

April 1st.—In the evening (Mr. Whitefield being gone) I begun expounding our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (one pretty remarkable precedent of field-preaching, though I suppose there were churches at that time also) to a little Society which was accustomed to meet once or twice a week in Nicholas Street.

Monday, 2nd.—At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city to about three thousand people. The scripture on which I spake was this (is it possible any one should be so ignorant, that it is fulfilled in every true minister of Christ?): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor."

Once convinced of the value of a particular undertaking, John Wesley was not the man to turn back from it; and the out-door preaching, once decided upon, led him step by step to build up the whole system of Methodism.

The compelling power which led to itinerant work was the constraining love of Christ, urging him to make the Saviour known to the ignorant and careless. The ignorance and immorality of the masses in England (and indeed in Europe) in the eighteenth century would be almost incredible to a modern reader; but contemporary evidence, offered from all sides, leaves no doubt about it. We have seen, in our preceding

chapter on George Whitefield, how the nation acquiesced in a prison system which condemned criminals, often morally innocent, as were unfortunate debtors and little children, to a hellish detention in which unsanitary conditions and death-dealing fever were but a part of the evil suffered. Such callousness was but a feature of the age. The lower classes meant nothing to the rich and educated ; they were in the place and rank to which a sensible Creator had assigned them—and what more need be said ? Drunkenness, immorality, and free-thinking were too prevalent among the wealthier classes for them to consider the same vices very deplorable in the poor. Only earnest Christians like Cowper, Hannah More, and Wilberforce, were smitten with compassion for the sorrows of those who not only shared the sins of the rich, but endured a misery of poverty and relentless toil which made their lives wretched and went far to condone their vices.

Of the frivolity of the fashionable élite, and the manner in which they passed their days, Fielding gives a glimpse in his novel *Joseph Andrews*. A character named Wilson describes in a rustic alehouse (it is a sketch endorsed by a thousand letters and diaries of the time) how a London man of fashion spent his time :—

In the morning I arose, took my great stick, and walked out in my green frock, with my hair in paper, and sauntered about till ten. Went to the auction ; told Lady B. she had a dirty face, laughed heartily at something Captain G. said (I can't remember what, as I did not very well hear it), whispered to Lord —, bowed to the Duke of —, and was going to bid for a snuff-box, but did not for fear I

should have it ; 2 to 4 dressed myself ; 4 to 6 dined ; 6 to 8 coffee-house ; 8 to 9 Drury Lane playhouse ; 10 to 12 drawing-room.

Dr. Benson, Bishop of Gloucester, writing to Bishop Berkeley of Cloyne in 1752, said :—

Your lordship calls this the freest country in Europe. There is indeed freedom of one kind in it, more, it is to be hoped, than in any other—a most unbounded licentiousness of all sorts ; a disregard to all authority, sacred and civil ; a regard to nothing but diversion and vicious pleasures. There is not only no safety of living in this town, but scarcely in the country now, robbery and murder are become so frequent. Our people are now become, what they never before were, cruel and inhuman.”

Drunkenness was so common that it shocked nobody, even when met in the Houses of Parliament or in the drawing-room ; and the recent introduction of gin, as Hogarth testifies in his pungent picture of “ Gin Lane,” was working appalling destitution amongst the working-classes of the towns. In 1736 there were in Westminster, Holborn, the Tower, and Finsbury alone (apart from London and Southwark) seven thousand and forty-four houses and shops in which gin was sold in retail. Painted boards were hung from almost every seventh house, inviting the poor to get tipsy for a penny, and dead drunk for twopence.

The sports of the time were in keeping with the spirit of the age, cock-fighting, bear-baiting, and prize-fighting being the chief. We read in the journals of the day, as of things quite customary, of women fighting in public for money or a new skirt, and of

bears and bulls baited to death by successive relays of big dogs ; whilst gaming was eagerly pursued by rich and poor, young and old.

Highwaymen were often popular heroes. Men of fashion, like Horace Walpole, bandied jokes with them in friendly intercourse. When a notorious criminal was haled to public execution his procession and death formed a public holiday ; and whilst songs and ballads vaunting his lawless deeds were sung and vended in the streets, friends in the crowd handed him liquor at various halting-places on his way to the scaffold.

Against this brutality the religion of the age seemed all but powerless. Bishop Butler's saying, published in 1736, that Christianity was taken as proved to be fictitious is well-known. The lower clergy were starved, marrying working-women, and bringing up their children as farm labourers or servants. The Church's sacraments were administered but rarely or marred by the utmost slovenliness. Even preaching was sorely neglected. On one occasion Wesley, in his old age when his many years' labour had helped to improve somewhat the standard of clerical diligence, visited Norwich, and found that though there were thirty-seven churches in the city, sermons were regularly preached on Sunday mornings in only two of them. Even before the Georgian period Bishop Burnet (who died in 1715) wrote :—

I must say the main body of our English clergy has always appeared dead and lifeless to me, and instead of animating one another, they rather seem to lay one another to sleep. I have observed the clergy in all the places through which I have travelled—Papists, Lutherans, Calvinists, Dissenters—but of

all of them our clergy are most remiss in their labour in private, and the least severe in their lives."

Young, writing of the French clergy just before the French Revolution, says, "The French clergy preserved, what is not always preserved in England, an exterior decency of behaviour. One did not find among them poachers or fox-hunters, who having spent the morning in scampering after the hounds, dedicate the evening to the bottle, and reel from inebriety to the pulpit." Attempts have been made of late years to prove that Church life in the eighteenth century was not so black as it has been painted;¹ but all that can be shown is that here and there piety was preserved, and that in the prevailing darkness God did not leave Himself wholly without witness. The religious societies of the time, like the hermits of the fourth century, were not so much an outcome of the feeling of the age as they were a protest against it.

Wesley's conduct in Church matters, and his occasional inconsistency as a Churchman, should in fairness always be viewed in the strong light of these two dominant facts—the appalling religious state of the England of his days, and his own unquenchable zeal to amend it. Both the crying needs of the time and his own burning love of Christ led him on from one step to another in his long career. If here and there a step was taken over the traces of Church custom, we must yet respect the unshaken will of the man who, in spite of his own naturally strong conservatism, felt himself forced to take the doubtful step.

¹ In speaking, in a general way, of the eighteenth century, we have to remember that there was a far higher standard in Church matters at the beginning of the century under Queen Anne than in the middle of the century when the Georgian regime had helped to deaden Church life.

Wesley was always a convinced and resolute Churchman, who longed and sought to be a maintainer and teacher of Catholic order ; but there were times when circumstances proved too strong for his good intentions. He was convinced that the Church was God's plan for saving mankind ; but he also knew that the Church of England in his days was asleep and degenerate. If the accepted Church services of the day could not stir men to a sense of sin, he, for one, would venture upon something which, accepted or not, would at least make religion real to men. There was nothing, after all, uncatholic or unchristian in some of the methods, such as out-door preaching, which his own age found unconventional. The saving of souls was of more importance than conventionality or propriety ; and Catholicism has never quite failed of the spirit of romantic adventure. So began his field-preaching.

Moreover, extraordinary times called for extraordinary methods which might even call for the temporary ignoring of normal principles. Hence sprang up his body of lay-preachers. If the priests of the Church preached no saving Gospel, whereas laymen were able and desirous to do so, who should dare to say them nay ? Defending his institution of lay-preachers, he writes in 1755 :—

I have not gone too far yet, I know ; but whether I have gone far enough, I am extremely doubtful. I see those running whom God hath not sent ; destroying their own souls, and those that hear them ; perverting the right ways of the Lord, and blaspheming the truth as it is in Jesus. I see the blind leading the blind, and both falling into the

ditch. Unless I warn, in all ways I can, these perishing souls of their danger, am I clear of the blood of these men? Soul-damning clergymen lay me under more difficulties than soul-saving laymen!

This principle of meeting the needs of the times according to their intensity with some corresponding urgent remedy led him later into taking another and far more serious step, which caused his brother Charles and other friends great pain and perplexity—namely, the “ordinations.” Wesley’s argument seems to have run thus. Here was America, open to the Gospel; but bishops would not, or could not, go out themselves or send out priests to sow the harvest and maintain the continuity of the Church. If there was the slightest possibility (and Wesley always seems to have thought this possible or probable) that bishops and presbyters differed rather in degree than in their actual office—then America, in her dire need, should have the benefit of the doubt; and he, as presbyter, would do what bishops would not, and consecrate men to the work. This was doubtless wrong and illogical; yet we may admire the courage and the love for souls which drove him to the taking of such a step.

All this “enthusiasm,” which urged that the Spirit was definitely leading him and his friends into methods not found in recently beaten paths, caused much heart-searching to the conservative and timorous, and, indeed, often to the thoughtful. And it aroused the bitter opposition of the ungodly.

The peculiar “manifestations” which accompanied Wesley’s preaching further caused distress and doubt to many who yet admired his courage and his earnestness. As in the case of Whitefield’s preaching, con-

vulsions, screaming, and swooning often overcame Wesley's hearers ; and he sometimes found himself hard put to it to defend or explain these strange happenings. The one thing which he knew for certain was that at the meetings at which these things happened the power of the Spirit was manifested. In a letter he put this point of view :—

While we were praying at a Society here, on Tuesday, the 1st instant, the power of God (so I call it) came so mightily among us, that one, and another, and another, fell down as thunderstruck. In that hour, many that were in deep anguish of spirit, were all filled with peace and joy. Ten persons, till then in sin, doubt, and fear, found such a change that sin had no more dominion over them ; and instead of the spirit of fear, they are now filled with that of love, and joy, and a sound mind. A quaker, who stood by, was very angry at them, and was biting his lips, and knitting his brows, when the Spirit of God came upon him also, so that he fell down as one dead. We prayed over him, and he soon lifted up his head with joy, and joined with us in thanksgiving.

Even when the manifestations were outwardly repulsive, Wesley schooled himself to accept them, as he explains in the following passage from another letter written in his seventy-second year. " You want more simplicity," he writes to his correspondent ; " I will give you the first instance that occurs, of that simplicity which I mean. Some years since, a woman sitting by me, fell into strong convulsions, and presently began to speak as in the name of God Both her look, motions, and tone of voice, were peculiarly

shocking. Yet I found my mind as ready to receive what she said as if she had spoken with the look, motion, and accent of Cicero."

But it was hardly to be expected that the ordinary rank and file of sober-minded Christians, brought up to dread any display of religious emotion, would feel the same as Wesley did about this. And we must bear that in mind, when we are inclined to condemn the many parish priests who for some time refused to admit into their pulpits a preacher whose preaching had such strange results. Bishops, too, on the whole were not so much antagonistic to Wesley as cautious and wondering. In their interviews with him, they seem to have sympathised with his earnestness, and to have been satisfied with warning him not to encourage extravagance in any way, or with urging him to keep to some settled cure of souls.

And herein was another standing grievance of his brother clergy against Wesley. For this—to keep himself to a settled cure—was exactly what Wesley had no mind to do. He was determined, according to his ordination vow, "to seek for Christ's sheep that were dispersed abroad, and for His children who were in the midst of this naughty world." So he did not hesitate to intrude into any parish. If the parson welcomed him, he was glad; but if the parson would not welcome him, he would none the less preach in that parish what was to him the pure word of God. So that we cannot wonder that, though he had enthusiastic clerical helpers, he found in most of the clergy a coolness or antagonism to his efforts.

What was far less excusable was when parish priests, as occasionally happened, stirred crowds to violence or persecution, or encouraged them in excesses of

various kinds. The crowds in many places needed no such encouragement. Wesley was declared a Papist or Jesuit in disguise (his definite Church principles probably accounted for that slander), and no lie was too vile or impossible to be uttered against him. He was frequently stoned and threatened with death. His open-air meetings were broken up by cattle driven amongst his hearers. Magistrates grossly failed to keep order when the disorder was against Wesley or his friends, as at Sheffield, where they allowed a mob to pull down the preaching-house. Even the press-gang was requisitioned as a means of persecution, and some of Wesley's followers were impressed for foreign service; whilst at Oxford, in 1768, six students were expelled from St. Edmund's Hall solely because they sympathised with Methodism.

Yet Wesley never flinched from his high optimism. The work was not his, but God's. What else mattered? To a timid friend he wrote:—

Every week, and almost every day, I am bespattered in the public papers. Many are in tears on the occasion, many terribly frightened, and crying out, "O what will the end be?" What will it be? Why—Glory to God in the highest, and peace and goodwill among men.

Partly because of his intense earnestness, partly because of his natural powers of leadership, and because of his utter fearlessness in danger, he would win over hostile crowds to listen to him. He never refused to face a mob, however threatening; and wherever he went, souls were moved to penitence and to a sense of God's great mercy in forgiveness.

III

Souls thus won in countless places—in Scotland and Ireland as well as in England and Wales—needed encouraging and sustaining. Often they found no help at all from the religion or services of their parish church ; and they could not be allowed to lapse again into indifference.

It was here that Wesley's work was more enduring than Whitefield's. Whereas Whitefield was content to pass on to his next preaching venue and leave his awakened converts to God, Wesley wisely saw the great danger of the newly-aroused, and sought to avert it by the organising of Christian fellowship for them.

How could souls, hitherto formal or wholly careless in religious matters, but now awakened to a deep sense of personal relationship with God, be enabled to persevere in their newly-found love and fear of God, when their parish priest either scoffed at their new zeal, or could find no place for it in his religious system ?

This was Wesley's problem. He set to solve it by establishing, wherever he went, Societies for mutual edification and common prayer. The whole purpose of these Societies was not to secede from the Church, but to strengthen members of the Church in true religion. Thus quite early a Society was founded at Bristol, which passed a resolution that "all the members should obey the Church to which they belonged by fasting on Fridays." Members of the Societies were required to attend their parish church regularly and to receive Holy Communion there, even in cases where they did not esteem their parish priest.

Both Wesley himself, and his preachers by his strict injunction, were careful not to hold their meetings during the hours of Church services.¹ The Societies were, in fact, to be Church guilds, springing out of the desire of the newly-awakened to meet and study and pray together.

Out of the Societies grew the weekly class-meetings. As members of the Societies grew indifferent or, in some cases, fell into scandalous living, it was felt that some disciplinary system was needed. This was at first supplied by local leaders in each place calling at the houses of Methodists for the weekly payments to their society, and, as they called, enquiring into the spiritual condition of members. This round of visits proving impossible to maintain, weekly meetings of members under a class-leader were held in its place—"the very thing," Wesley commented, "that we have wanted so long. I desired," he continued, "that each leader would make a particular enquiry into the behaviour of those whom he saw weekly. They did so. Many disorderly walkers were detected; some turned from the evil of their ways; some were put away from us; many saw it with fear, and rejoiced unto God with reverence."

From the class-meeting next sprang the "Watch-night"—corresponding to the *Vigiliæ* of the early Church—at first held monthly, and finally once a year on New Year's Eve.

In the same way grew up the "Quarterly Meeting"

¹ Thus in 1786 the classes at Deptford were anxious to hold their Sunday service at the same hour as the Church service. Wesley told them that this would be formal separation from the Church; and when they persisted, he told them plainly, "If you are resolved, you may have your service in Church hours; but, remember, from that time you will see my face no more."

of members to be examined by John Wesley himself, who gave satisfactory members tickets which he withheld from the unsatisfactory ; the Band Meeting of distinct kinds of members, such as married or single, men or women, to confess their faults and difficulties one to another ; the Love-feast, held once a quarter ; and the Penitents' Meeting.

Several of these institutions were based upon Wesley's close knowledge of the customs of the Primitive Church. His special familiarity with the earliest ages of Christianity made him far in advance of his age in discriminating between customs and thoughts which were primitive and those which were purely Roman.

These various organisations were summed up in the yearly Conference of the Societies. In 1744 Wesley gathered together a few clergymen and lay preachers in London to discuss questions of doctrine and discipline. This became a yearly event, and was held in such centres as London, Bristol, or Leeds, gradually developing into the recognised executive of the whole of the Methodist Societies.

As the numbers of converts increased, Wesley appointed "lay-assistants" or "helpers" in the various centres, whose work was, if no duly ordained minister was available, "to feed and guide the flock," to "provoke the regular ministers to jealousy, and to supply their lack of service towards them who are perishing for lack of knowledge."

This appointing of lay-preachers caused great searchings of heart amongst the Churchmen of the time, though it does not seem so strange to us who are familiar with the lay-readers of our own time. In the scarcity of clergy who were willing to help Wesley,

the system was necessary if his work was to be maintained. But Wesley himself always spoke of it as an extraordinary measure, due to an extraordinary need ; and it involved him in long years of constant struggle to keep back his lay-helpers from grasping at the privileges of the priesthood. Many of his lay-preachers, beginning modestly enough, soon chafed under the restraint of their position, and were anxious to administer the sacraments.

The labours which all this organisation, in addition to his incessant itinerant preaching, imposed upon Wesley were past belief. They were Herculean ; and only one of far more than ordinary physical strength and vitality could possibly have undertaken them, and endured them for over fifty years. For fifty-two years he generally preached two, and often three or four sermons a day, in addition to an immense number of exhortations to miscellaneous gatherings and meetings. At the age of seventy-six he spent Christmas Day (the year was 1779) as follows : He conducted a short service at 4 a.m. in the New Chapel, City Road ; read prayers and preached at noon at West Street Chapel, near Leicester Square ; in the afternoon he preached again at the New Chapel ; preaching yet again at St. Sepulchre's in the evening ! Four years later he visited Holland ; in 1789, being then eighty-six years old, he undertook a preaching tour in Ireland. In 1786, at eighty-three years of age, he wrote :—

I am a wonder to myself. It is now twelve years since I have felt such a sensation as weariness. I am never tired either with writing, preaching, or travelling.

His travelling record from 1738 for fifty years takes one's breath away. Suffice it to say that, over shocking roads and in all weathers, he drove or rode (there were no railways then, of course) some two hundred and twenty-five thousand miles, to preach over forty thousand sermons, mostly in the open air.

In addition to all this, he superintended the training, and helped in the education, of his preachers, often men with little or no education. He maintained two schools at Kingswood, one for the colliers' children, the other for the children of the preachers. Disciplinary troubles in his Societies called for his constant and vigilant care and personal attention. He was the sole controller not only of his schools, but of several charitable institutions. He was in reality the dictator and autocrat of the yearly Conference, and the arbiter in all disputes between the many preachers and other office-bearers of the Societies. In addition, he compiled and published magazines, hymns, translations, abridgments of books which he thought might be useful to his lay-preachers and converts. Not only did he write several books upon theological subjects, but even a volume also of medical advice for such as cared for it ! He carefully kept a conscientious *Journal*, which was finally published in eight large volumes, and found time both to study current theological literature and to write countless letters to enquirers and friends.

Most of this literary and editorial work was published from his London centre, the Foundry, an old rambling shed which he bought in 1739 and made into a chapel with a residence for himself and some of his helpers. For thirty years he lived here when in London, until larger premises became necessary, and the new chapel in the City Road was built.

It can be imagined that when Wesley married, in 1751, the widow of a Threadneedle Street merchant, the venture was hardly a success. Mrs. Wesley was not, in any case, a suitable wife for him; and, as in George Whitefield's case, the wife of such a strenuous traveller and worker must have been placed in a somewhat unenviable position. More than once the ill-matched couple separated for a time; on one such occasion Wesley wrote of her—*Non eam reliqui, non dimisi, non revocabo*. It would be a thankless task to try to apportion blame to either of the couple for the failure of their married life.

IV

In his great revival work John Wesley was extraordinarily dependent upon his own magnificent organising powers and his own forceful character, which made him more or less autocrat and dictator of the movement which he had inspired. Yet he had, of course, many worthy and zealous fellow-workers in his labours of love.

First and foremost was his brother Charles, a man of like training and tastes as himself, though rather more unbending than was John at critical times in the maintenance of definite Church principles. Charles, who was five years younger than his brother John, joined the Holy Club at Oxford before him, whilst John was helping their father at Epworth. He too was ordained, and became a fervent co-operator in the good cause. An eloquent preacher, a staunch Churchman, and a writer of fine hymns (including "Lo! He comes with clouds descending!" and "Hark! the

herald angels sing ")¹ he was a tower of strength to the Methodist movement, and was largely responsible for its adherence to the Church for so long. Moreover, he was a sounder judge of character than John, less deceived by specious professions or by the fair sex, and far quicker to discern that after some years the movement was beginning to drift away from the Church.

Though the clergy, on the whole, did not actively sympathise or co-operate with the Wesleys, several priests were amongst their most active helpers. Whitefield we have already noticed. Piers of Bexley and Perronet of Shoreham (both Kentish parishes), Grimshaw of Haworth, Fletcher of Madeley, Berridge of Everton, Venn of Huddersfield, and others less well-known, all either encouraged Methodism in their parishes or helped with itinerant preaching outside them.

Only clergy, as we have seen, were allowed to administer the sacraments in Methodist buildings; and laymen were allowed to preach in them only in default of assistance from ordained ministers. As time passed and the bias of Methodism towards dissent increased, clerical helpers became still fewer, and, it must be confessed, of poorer quality.

One of them, Dr. Coke, an ambitious and restless Welshman, brought Wesley into the troubled waters of controversy. His great zeal and activity won him favour with the famous preacher in his old age; and the later inconsistencies of Wesley, from the Church point of view, are generally ascribed to his influence.

¹ Other hymns by Charles Wesley are "Christ, Whose glory fills the skies," "Victim Divine, Thy grace we claim," "Hail the day that sees Him rise," "Jesu, Lover of my soul," "Rejoice, the Lord is King," "Let saints on earth in concert sing"; whilst John wrote, "Author of Life Divine," "Lo! God is here! let us adore!" and "Thou hidden love of God."

Whether this was so or no, Wesley, in face of the great need of America, for whom the English bishops refused to ordain missionaries, went through a form of ordination, by virtue of which Coke considered himself a bishop or a bishop's equivalent, and two others considered themselves as ordained presbyters. Charles Wesley was indignant and almost heart-broken at this breach of Church order on his brother's part; and, indeed, it appears indefensible. John, as we have seen, seems to have been inclined to the view that episcopacy was rather a higher function of the presbyterate than a separate order; yet he was hard put to it to make any real defence of his action, though he repeated it for Scotland, where the need was much less apparent. When the elders, "ordained" for Scotland, came back south of the border, they found to their disgust that he regarded them as laymen—in England, at least. The mental attitude of Wesley, otherwise so staunch a Churchman, on this point, is involved in some mystery; and his neglect of Church order doubtless made it harder for him finally to retain his more restless followers within the fold which they had long been desirous to leave.

Wesley died in 1791, at the great age of eighty-eight. In harness to the end, though obviously worn out, he quietly slipped out of his earthly life after a few days' extreme weakness. The last words written by him were a noble letter to William Wilberforce, exhorting him to continue his efforts against slavery.¹

Long before his death, he had won the esteem and respect of all sensible Englishmen, and was regarded as a great man and Christian and a general benefactor. So stout a Churchman as Dr. Johnson esteemed him

¹ See *William Wilberforce* in this volume, p. 213.

highly. Bishops, who indeed in his earlier days had seldom been actively hostile to him, showed their appreciation of his noble character and labours, and his fellow-clergy welcomed him everywhere in their pulpits.

V

There is no space in this short sketch of Wesley's life to discuss the question as to how far modern Methodism has drifted from the intentions of its founder. Suffice it to say that Wesley remained a devoted Churchman to the end, and declared that, whilst Methodism allowed full liberty of belief to its adherents, he for his part would deem it a sin to forsake the Church. Early in his ministry he said :—

What may we reasonably suppose believe to be God's design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists? Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church, and to spread Scriptural holiness over the land.

As he began, so he ended. A year before his death he wrote in his *Arminian Magazine* :—

I declare once more that I live and die a member of the Church of England; and that none who regard my judgment or advice will ever separate from it.

A booklet, published some years ago, giving extracts from his works under the title of *Pastoral Advice of the Rev. J. Wesley*,¹ gives the following analysis of Wesley's Churchmanship :—

The Rev. John Wesley was a Churchman from

¹ By an anonymous writer, who, for each of the following statements, gave "chapter and verse" from Wesley's own writings.

conviction, felt it his duty to remain in the Church, and frequently expressed his determination to do so.

Charged the Methodists not to leave the Church, even though they thought their minister's life or doctrine was bad.

Required the Society to attend church constantly, and to receive the Holy Communion there, and urged them to do so even if they did not esteem their minister.

Spoke from his own experience and that of another of the great blessing obtained in going to church, and described the loss which he said some persons had sustained by not doing so.

Would not let the Methodists hold their meetings in church hours, as he considered that this would be a formal separation from the Church, showed how experience proved that the adoption of this course would not benefit the Society, enforced his rule on this point as strictly as he could, and was careful to follow it himself.

Took steps to prevent separation from the Church.

Reported the decisions of eight Conferences in favour of continuing in the Church, and with regard to each of them said, or implied, that the decision was unanimous.

When he was dying, and just before he "changed for death," expressed strongly his wish that no change should be made in the condition of affairs; and, in almost his last words, prayed for God's blessing on the Church.

Two years after his death the Conference decided against any repetition of Methodist "ordinations"; but two years later it permitted that where members

of the Societies wished it, they could have sacramental services by their own preachers. This was, of course, the beginning of the end, as regards adherence to the Church ; and for the next fifty years the separation of Methodism from the Church gradually but surely proceeded. From being a preaching guild in the Church it became a distinct sect. Yet how slow the process was is seen in the trenchant fact that within the present generation (and still more so in our fathers' time) North Country Methodists were still wont to receive the Blessed Sacrament in their parish churches on Sunday mornings, and attend the services of prayer and preaching in their own chapels on Sunday evenings.

In the face of these facts, it is hard to see how Methodism can justify its present position. We Churchmen may well pray, as doubtless its founder is praying, that it may come back to Mother Church, and take once more an honoured place within her fold as a preaching order for the revival of personal fervour for Christ.

JOHN NEWTON

I

Evangelical writers—Newton's early life, degradation and conversion—Marriage and ordination—Olney ; friendship with Scott, Cowper, and other religious leaders—Incumbent of St. Mary Woolnoth—His personal influence—His hymns—The *Cardiphonia*, a mirror of the writer's personality—Newton's favourite themes : human depravity and the all-sufficiency of Christ—His certainty of God's overruling Providence—His power of analysis and wise sayings.

THE writings of the Evangelical school in the eighteenth century, with their pious fervour, their simplicity of diction, and their insistence upon personal religion, were as a refreshing stream in a waterless desert to those English men and women who longed for books which made the religion of Jesus the first and supreme interest in life.

In our own days, when the sense of personal religion is more permanently established amongst us, we find some of these books insipid enough, and may wonder what was found in them to call for many editions. But it is there—in their appeal to the sense of the personal need of a Saviour (an appeal already made in a different way by William Law)—that the answer to our wonder is found. Most of the Evangelical writers lived and wrote simply to teach to others what had become so dear to themselves. All other learning, all other books, were worth little or nothing to them. " Were dying sinners," asked William Romaine, " ever converted by

the spots on the moon? Was ever miser reclaimed from avarice by Jupiter's Belt?" William Cowper even had serious doubts as to whether he was right in making his poetry attractive and picturesque; and decided in the affirmative only on the plea that so his verses might the better be made a means of teaching his readers sacred truth.

Venn's *Complete Duty of Man*, Wilberforce's *Practical View*, Hannah More's books and tracts, such biographies as the lives of Scott and Venn or Newton's *Narrative*, Scott's *Commentary*, Cowper's poems, and the hymns of the Wesleys, Toplady and others, appealed to religious circles in their different ways.

II

Not the least influential amongst these writers was John Newton, author of hymns, letters, sermons and autobiography.

John Newton's conversion is one of the great romances of religion, standing side by side in interest, though not in importance, with such dramatic events in religious history as the conversions of St. Paul, St. Augustine and John Bunyan. If truth is really stranger than fiction, it has rarely been stranger than in the life story of this man, who could truthfully describe himself as a "brand plucked from the burning."

In his own vivid biography, the *Narrative*, he has given us a graphic account of his extraordinary career. Born in London in 1725, of a ship captain and a pious Dissenting mother, he was destined for the ministry; but his mother died when he was young, and her early teaching (though perhaps never quite lost) was

swamped in vicious habits as he grew to manhood. He drifted seawards ; but wherever his ship and whatever his rank—he was in turn midshipman and common sailor—he sank continually into deeper and deeper degradation, and was ever sworn foe to discipline or goodness.

At twenty years of age he left a ship off the African coast, near Sierra Leone, to join a white slave-trader who was living there. The next two years were of incredible degradation. Ill-treated by his employer, hated and bullied by his master's black mistress, racked with fever, often so starved that he would go into the woods at night to gnaw roots, he was still unmoved by his misery to seek God. In his own words, he " was no farther changed than a tiger tamed by hunger."

Yet through this outwardly hopeless and abandoned life there ran a silver thread of hope and aspiration. At seventeen years of age he had fallen in love with his little Kentish cousin, Mary Catlett ; and this pure love was to keep alive in him a tiny spark of spiritual fire when the fear of God had failed him. Through all his degradation he never forgot her, and always longed for her affection. Moreover, the intellectual energy which was one of his characteristics all his life showed itself, even in this African swamp, by his study of a stray volume of Euclid.

In 1747 a trading ship sent by his father to look for him picked him up ; and during the rest of the voyage the captain, himself a passionate man, was wont to shudder at Newton's blasphemies, and declared that he had a Jonah on board, who would bring sure trouble upon the crew. However, neither these remonstrances, nor several narrow escapes from death (one

being from drowning during a drinking bout) availed to arouse the young man to any sense of sin.

But gradually under-currents began to surge in his soul. A chance glance at a copy of the *Imitatio Christi*, and then the danger of an appalling storm which nearly broke up the ship, brought him first into an uneasy feeling, and then upon his knees to pray and to study his Bible, with the result that when the ship reached Londonderry he received the Holy Communion after much private meditation and many resolutions.

During the next six years he received, he says, no personal help from Christian preaching or conversation; nor did he at once give up his trade of slave-dealing, which was not as yet accounted a disgraceful calling. But events all tended to keep alive in him his new-born sense of need. In 1750—then twenty-five years of age—he married his cousin Mary, with whom he was to spend a happy married life of forty years. He was touched by the death of his father, who had sailed for America on the very day that John had reached England, and so had not seen his returned prodigal; and during subsequent voyages several further narrow escapes from death (seafaring was a more dangerous calling then than now) maintained in him a sense of the divine Providence, and of the mercies which follow the sinner.

Leaving the sea, he settled in a situation at Liverpool, where he assiduously studied the classics in his spare time, learning Horace almost by heart and acquiring also a knowledge of Hebrew.

Little by little the desire for pastoral work grew. His first thought was to join the Dissenters, but finally he decided that Holy Orders in the Church would open out a wider sphere of usefulness. Rejected at first by

the Archbishop of York, he was not ordained by the Bishop of Lincoln until six years later, when he was licensed to serve the parish of Olney.

Here Newton became the friend of most of the best-known Evangelical leaders, both clergy and laity. Thomas Scott, the commentator, was a close neighbour; the poet Cowper lived at Olney, and looked upon Newton as his spiritual director; whilst John Thornton, the generous banker and friend of Wilberforce, was keenly interested in his work, and allowed him £200 a year.

Opinions differ as to how far Newton's ministry at Olney was a success. Certainly his parishioners did not always appreciate him or his labours; but popularity is hardly a criterion of the highest kind of success. The generally low moral standard of the age prevailed at Olney as elsewhere, and must have made the work of a parish priest exceedingly difficult.

After sixteen years' curacy at Olney under a non-resident vicar, Newton was presented to the incumbency of St. Mary Woolnoth, by Mr. Thornton; and in this London parish he laboured until he died in 1807, nearly thirty years later, at the age of eighty-two.

In this parish Newton found the usual difficulties which beset the incumbent of a wealthy parish. "It grieves me," he said once, "to see so few of my wealthy parishioners come to church. I always consider the rich as under greater obligations to the preaching of the gospel than the poor. For at church, the rich must hear the whole truth as well as others. There they have no mode of escape. But let them once get home, you will be troubled to get at them; and, when you are admitted, you are so fettered with punctilio, so interrupted and damped with the frivolous



JOHN NEWTON

FROM A DRAWING BY J. RUSSELL, R.A.

In the possession of the Church Missionary Society

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conversation of their friends, that, as Archbishop Leighton says, 'it is well if your visit does not prove a blank or a blot.' "

It was not as a preacher that Newton won the great influence, which he undoubtedly possessed, so much as by his intercourse with individuals. He was always on the look-out to utter his message, in the delivery of which he would exercise great patience and gentleness and perseverance. And his transparent zeal and sincerity must have opened to his persuasions the hearts of many whose welfare he sought. He had a true love of souls. "When I hear a knock at my study door," he said, "I hear a message from God; it may be a lesson of instruction, perhaps a lesson of patience; but since it is his message, it must be interesting."

To pass on that message was his purpose to the end. When his friends urged the old man of eighty to rest from his labours (his sight, hearing, and memory were all failing) his answer was: "I cannot stop. Shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak?"

III

Though Newton laboured thus strenuously in the pulpit, his influence for good was probably more widely felt through his writings. He was an assiduous and voluminous writer upon religious subjects. The *Olney Hymns*, written by him, are in three books, and contain three hundred and forty-eight hymns. These are mostly dull and prosaic enough. Such lines as these are very far from poetry:—

O how I love Thy holy Word,
Thy gracious covenant, O Lord !
It guides me in the peaceful way,
I think upon it all the day.

Yet among thousands of lines which are no better than these, we find such treasures as : "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds," "Come my soul, thy suit prepare," "Hark, my soul, it is the Lord," "God moves in a mysterious way," and "There is a fountain filled with blood." One could wish that the writer, instead of reeling off so much that was mere doggerel, had spent his care and thought upon some few hymns only.

Such of Newton's sermons, too, as appear in his works (and in this they agree with most of the printed sermons of the time) are but dull reading to the modern reader.

When we turn, however, to his letters, the tale is very different. As a letter-writer Newton almost equals Cowper, greatest of epistollers. His prose is lucid, vigorous and sane ; whilst the religious matter compels the reader's interest, and, in much the same way as Law's *Serious Call*, carries him unconsciously, yet eagerly, from page to page. The best of these letters were published in *Cardiphonia, or the Utterance of the Heart*, a collection of letters to the Earl of Dartmouth (patron of the Olney living) and to other friends.

This book is full of interest as the expression of a vigorous and deeply religious mind ; and it gives us a picture in a way which his sermons do not, of the real Newton. It was indeed the utterance of the writer's heart. "I number," the author wrote, "my Christian correspondents among my principal blessings, a few judicious, pious friends, to whom, when I get leisure to write, I send my heart by turns. I can trust them with my inmost sentiments, and can write with no more disguise than I think." The letters

are also a mirror, so to speak, of contemporary Evangelical thought and practice.

There are two ever-recurring subjects upon which Newton in these letters loves to dilate.

The first is, *the natural total depravity of the human heart*. This, of course, was one of the leading doctrines by which Evangelical preachers were wont to rouse their hearers to a sense of danger and need, and Newton is continually insisting upon it. With him man is hopelessly polluted and lost until he has been born again; and by this new birth he means not regeneration in the sacrament of baptism, but a change of heart.

Closely interwoven with this dogma of total human depravity is the second doctrine in which our author delights—*the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ* to restore fallen nature. The misery of the unaided human heart can find abundant joy and strength in the free grace and power of the Saviour.

I have gained that which I once would rather have been without, such accumulated proofs of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my heart, as I hope, by the Lord's blessing, have, in some measure, taught me to know what I mean, when I say, Behold, I am vile! And, in connection with this, I have gained such experience of the wisdom, power and compassion of my Redeemer, the need, the worth of His Blood, righteousness, ascension, and intercession, the glory that He displays in pardoning iniquity and sin, and passing by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage, that my soul cannot but cry out, Who is a God like unto Thee?

Upon this subject Newton's language breaks forth

into flights of impassioned eloquence, in which his own heart's love for the Redeemer is laid bare. When sinners, he says,

After a long experience of their own deceitful hearts, after repeated proofs of their weakness, wilfulness, ingratitude, and insensibility, find that none of these things can separate them from the love of Christ, Jesus becomes more and more precious to their souls. They love much, because much has been forgiven them. They dare not, they will not, ascribe anything to themselves, but are glad to acknowledge that they must have perished (if possible) a thousand times over, if Jesus had not been their Saviour, their Shepherd and their Shield. When they were wandering He brought them back, when fallen He raised them, when wounded He healed them, when fainting He revived them. By Him, out of weakness, they have been made strong ; He has taught their hands to war, and covered their heads in the day of battle.

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If I guess right at what passes in your heart, the name of Jesus is precious to you, and this is a sure token of salvation, and that of God. You could not have loved Him, if He had not loved you first. He spoke to you, and said, " Seek My face," before your heart cried to Him, " Thy face, O Lord, will I seek." But you complain, " Alas ! I love Him so little." That very complaint proves that you love Him a great deal ; for if you loved Him but a little, you would think you loved Him enough. A mother loves her child a great deal, yet does not complain for not loving it more ; nay, perhaps she hardly

thinks it possible. But such an infinite object is Jesus, that they who love Him better than parents or child, or any earthly relation or comfort, will still think they hardly love Him at all ; because they see such a vast disproportion between the utmost they can give, and what in Himself He deserves from them. But I can give you good advice and good news : love Him as well as you can now, and ere long you shall love Him better. O when you see Him as He is, then I am sure you will love Him indeed ! If you want to love Him better now while you are here, I believe I can tell you the secret how this is to be attained : *Trust Him*. The more you trust Him, the better you will love Him. If you ask further, How shall I do to trust Him ? I answer, *Try Him* : the more you make trial of Him, the more your trust in Him will be strengthened. Venture upon His promises ; carry them to Him, and see if He will not be as good as His word. But, alas ! Satan and unbelief work the other way. We are unwilling to try Him, and therefore unable to trust Him ; and what wonder, then, that our love is faint, for who can love at uncertainties ?

Can we wonder that the eighteenth century man who could write such letters as these found eager readers, and had a wide spiritual influence in an age when all earnestness in religion was decried (and decried in high spiritual places) as a dangerous self-deception, a perilous leaning upon impulse and sentiment ?

Another conviction in which Newton found himself strengthened with passing years was the assurance that God's directing hand *controlled the smallest events*. It was a belief which he shared in common with John

Wesley, and ascribed to God's mercies any help, or protection from danger, received on his arduous journeys.

In those awful days on the African coast, the ship which was searching for Newton on his father's behalf would not have brought to at that particular spot where he was found, had it not been that a fellow-servant happened at the time to be making upon the shore a fire whose smoke drew the crew's attention. He never forgot this, and many another strange coincidence in his adventurous life convinced him that continually, if man's eyes are but opened to see, he may discover the hand of God at work alike in the events of history and in those of individual biography.

I have lately read Robertson's *History of Charles V*, which, like most histories, I consider a comment upon those passages of Scripture which teach us the depravity of man, the deceitfulness of the heart, the ruinous effects of sin, and the powerful, though secret, rule of divine providence, moving, directing, controlling the designs and actions of men with an unerring hand, to the accomplishment of His own purposes, both of mercy and judgment . . . I should like to see a writer of Dr. Robertson's abilities give us a history upon this plan.

Newton shows in these letters a deep knowledge of human nature. He claimed that the study of the human heart was his favourite pursuit.

Some (ministers) are directed to state and defend the doctrines of the gospel ; some have a talent for elucidating difficult texts of Scripture ; some have a turn for explaining the prophetic parts, and so of the rest. For myself, if it be lawful to speak of

myself, and so far as I can judge, anatomy is my favourite branch ; I mean the study of the human heart, with its workings and counter-workings, as it is differently affected in a state of nature or of grace, in the different seasons of prosperity, conviction, temptation, sickness, and the approach of death.

He goes on to say that he could have had no better school for his spiritual anatomy than Olney, a parish of unsophisticated rustics who used speech, not to hide their feelings, but to express them.

Certainly, if he could read the intricacies of the hearts of others as well as he could read his own, he was no mean student. Commenting upon the text, " Ye cannot do the things that ye would," he goes on thus :

I *would not* be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and worse imaginations ; but this evil is present with me ; my heart is like a highway, like a city without walls or gates. Nothing so false, so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid, but it can obtain access, and that at any time, or in any place ; neither the study, the pulpit, nor even the Lord's table, exempt me from their intrusion. I sometimes compare my *words* to the treble of an instrument, which my *thoughts* accompany with a kind of bass, or rather anti-bass, in which every rule of harmony is broken, every possible combination of discord and confusion is introduced, utterly inconsistent with, and contradictory to, the intended melody. Ah ! what music would my praying and preachings often make in the ears of the Lord of Hosts if He listened to them as they are *mine* only ! By men, the upper part only (if I may so speak) is heard ; and small cause there is for self-gratulation, if they

should happen to commend, when conscience tells me, they would be struck with astonishment and abhorrence could they hear the whole.

This power of analysis gives Newton a spiritual insight which at times throw a startlingly clear light upon one's own inconsistencies and insincerities—in this resembling, perhaps more than any other book, the effect of William Law's logical and remorseless arguments.

In this same chapter, for instance, he is speaking of the love of self creeping into one's work to mar it :—

I do not affect to be thought ten feet high, and I know that a desire of being thought wise or good, is equally contrary to reason or truth. That is incontrovertibly true ; yet how often—in spite of its logical absurdity—we find ourselves hungering for the undeserved approbation of our fellows.

In another letter, writing of the spirit of trusting confidence in God's goodness, he says :—

For want of more of this spirit, multitudes of professing Christians perplex and wound themselves, and dishonour their high calling by continual anxieties, alarms and complaints. *They think nothing safe under the Lord's keeping, unless their own eye is likewise upon it.*¹

Of the charitable Christian he comments :—

He will no more wound another with his wit (if he has a talent that way) *than with a knife.*

Could the cruelty of the sarcastic tongue be better shown in one or two words ?

¹ The italics in this and the next two quotations are my own.

Again, writing of the value of time, he says : —

It is a precious talent, and our Christian profession opens a wide field for the due improvement of it. Much of it has been already lost, and therefore we are exhorted to redeem it. I think many things that custom pleads for will be excluded from a suitableness to a Christian, *for this one reason, that they are not consistent with the simple notion of the redemption of time.*

Here is a truth of which we all, in every age, need continual reminder :—

The first lesson in the school of Christ is to become a little child, sitting simply at His feet.

This is his attitude towards the chance of unexpected death :—

We are always equally in danger in ourselves, and always equally safe under the shadow of His wings. No storms, assaults, sieges, or pestilences can hurt us, till we have filled up His appointed measure of service ; and when our work is done, and He has ripened us for glory, it is no great matter by what means He is pleased to call us home to Himself.

Many more such pages of such wisdom might be quoted, but the reader may find these wise sayings in abundance for himself in the pages of *Cardiphonia*.

Whatever the laymen may find in the book, certainly a small devotional and practical manual for clergy might be compiled from the *Cardiphonia*.

Here, for instance, are Newton's comments upon certain sermons which had been forwarded for his criticism :—

They will not answer your desired end. I am persuaded that you wish to be useful—to reclaim

sinners from their evil ways, to inspire them with a love to God, and a sincere aim to walk in obedience to His will. May I not venture to appeal to yourself, that you meet with little success ; that the people to whom you preach, though they, perhaps, give you a patient hearing, yet remain as they were, unchanged and unholy ? It must be so ; there is but one sort of preaching which God blesses to these purposes—that which makes all the world guilty before God, and sets forth Jesus Christ (as the brazen serpent was proposed by Moses), that guilty and condemned sinners, by looking to Him and believing on His Name, may be healed and saved. The most pressing exhortations to repentance and amendment of life, unless they are enforced in a certain way, which only God can teach, will leave our hearers much as they find them.

To a curate he writes :—

Preferment is not necessary, either to our peace or our usefulness.

In a similar strain he writes to one newly preferred to a living :—

I congratulate you, likewise, upon your accession to —, not because it is a good living, in a genteel neighbourhood, and a fine country ; but because I believe the Lord sends you there for fulfilling the desires He has given you, of being useful to souls. Church preferment, in any other view, is dreadful ; and I would as soon congratulate a man upon seeing a millstone tied about his neck to sink him into the depths of the sea, as upon his obtaining what is called a good living, except I thought him determined to spend and be spent in the cause of the Gospel.

A parish is an awful millstone, indeed, to those who see nothing valuable in the flock but the fleece ; but the Lord has impressed your heart with a sense of the glory and importance of His truth, and the worth of souls, and animated your zeal by the most powerful motive—the knowledge of His constraining love.

To a fellow-clergyman whose wife is dangerously ill, he sends a letter which ends as follows :—

Many a time the desire of my eyes has been threatened, many a time my heart has been brought low ; but, from what I have known at such seasons, I have reason to hope that had it been His pleasure to bring upon me the thing that I feared, His everlasting arm would have upheld me from sinking under the stroke. As ministers, we are called to comfort the Lord's afflicted people, and to tell them the knowledge of His love is a cordial able to keep the soul alive under the sharpest trials. We must not wonder that He sometimes puts us in a way of showing that we do not deal in unfelt truths, but that we find ourselves that solid consolation in the Gospel which we encourage others to expect from it. You have now such an occasion of glorifying the Lord ; I pray He may enable you to improve it, and that all around you may see that He is with you, and that His good word is the support and anchor of your soul.

And English literature can show few lines more inspiring to the “fisher of men” than this exhortation :—

Remember your high calling—you are a minister and ambassador of Christ : you are entrusted with the most honourable and important employment than can engage and animate the heart of man.

Filled and fired with a constraining sense of the love of Jesus, and the worth of souls ; impressed with an ardour to carry war into Satan's kingdom, to storm his strongholds, and rescue his captives—you will have little leisure to think of anything else. How does the love of glory stimulate the soldier, make him forget and forego a thousand personal tendernesses, and prompt him to cross oceans, to traverse deserts, to scale mountains, and plunge into the greatest hardships and the thickest dangers ? They do it for a corruptible crown, a puff of smoke, an empty fame ; their highest prospect is the applause and favour of their prince. We, likewise, are soldiers ; we have a Captain and a Prince Who deserves our all. They who know Him, and have hearts to conceive of His excellence and to feel their obligations to Him, cannot indeed seek their own glory, but His glory is dearer to them than a thousand lives. They owe Him their souls, for He redeemed them with blood, His own blood : and by His grace, He subdued and pardoned them when they were rebels, and in arms against Him. Therefore they are not their own, they would not be their own. When His standard is raised, when His enemies are in motion, when His people are to be rescued, they go forth clothed with His panoply, they fight under His eye, they are sure of His support, and He shows them the conqueror's crown. O when they think of that *eu, doule agathe* with which He has promised to welcome them home when the campaign is over, hard things seem easy, and bitter things sweet ; they count nothing, not even their own lives, dear, so that they may finish their course with joy.

WILLIAM COWPER

I

The charm of the eighteenth century—Cowper's early days, insanity, conversion and recovery—Olney, Mrs. Unwin and Newton—His writings and growing fame—His later days—Cowper as Churchman—His daily life and Puritan spirit—Criticism of clergy and Church services—The influence and naturalness of his poetry—His charm as a letter-writer—Three specimens.

It would be hard to say exactly what constitutes the unfailing charm of the English literature and history of the eighteenth century.

But one reason for that charm is undoubtedly this, that the century was a transition period. The student of the times stands upon ground midway between the days of the Stuarts and Hanoverians (days which for us belong irretrievably to the Past) and the Victorian era, which is so very near to our Present. The first year of the century was barely fifty years after Charles had laid his royal head upon the block at Whitehall; whilst its last year brings us within measurable distance of railways and electric telegraphy.

The eighteenth century, thus merged at its beginning and its end into these two epochs, presents many features of both of them; so much so that in its literature at one moment we experience the charm of finding ourselves in surroundings wholly strange and of a bygone age, whilst at the next we find the outlook strangely identical with our own. As there is abundant contemporary material from which to study the phases

of both the passing generation and the age to come, we are able to enter freely into the joys and sorrows of an epoch which is at once so dissimilar from our own, and yet is its parent. From whatever point of view we approach it—its history, its literature, its religion—the century is full of vivid interest, and its great writers have opened out its world to us.

In this particular, William Cowper—Evangelical Churchman, poet, great letter-writer—is characteristic of his age. In his writings we are brought into vivid touch with the vanished Georgian period, the days of duels and silver shoe-buckles and perukes ; and yet we move at ease amongst scenes and surroundings which might be of to-day. If the range of his life was very limited, we have it presented to us with extraordinary vividness ; and as a mirror of contemporary thought and religion, it is full of interest for a modern reader.

II

William Cowper's father was Rector of Berkhamstead, and it was there that the future poet was born in 1731. He had literary blood in his veins, for his mother, a Miss Donne, belonged to the family of the famous Dean of St. Paul's. She must have been a strong and fine character, for though her son was only six years old when she died, he maintained a vivid and intensely affectionate recollection of her throughout his life. At this tender age he was sent, in accordance with the custom of the time, to a boarding school. Bullying made the little boy's life miserable, and he was withdrawn for a while. At ten he was sent to Westminster ; and here, somewhat strangely, the sensitive boy seems to have been very happy enjoying

the school sports, and picking up a taste for the classics. One of his schoolfellows was Warren Hastings.

At eighteen he was articled to a London attorney, in whose office Thurlow, afterwards Lord Chancellor, was his fellow-clerk. At the end of his three years he took chambers, first in the Middle, and then in the Inner Temple, and divided his time between not very serious study of law and much intercourse with a circle of *littérateurs* who met in the Nonsense Club. Cowper himself, at this time, wrote occasional light essays and verses for various journals.

In 1756 his father died. In 1763 his legal studies, coupled with the influence of a relative, produced the offer of a clerkship in the House of Lords. The appointment was quite to Cowper's taste ; but at this critical moment in his life he went mad, and tried to commit suicide.

His complaint seems to have been constitutional rather than due to any particular cause ; but crossed love for his cousin Theodora may have contributed to the trouble. For eighteen months he was in a private asylum ; and here, ministered to spiritually as well as physically by a pious doctor, he was converted to a living belief in his Saviour, and his darkness passed from him. According to his own account, he rose one morning feeling more cheerful than usual, and, taking his Bible, read a verse in the Epistle to the Romans.

Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full Beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon in His blood, and the fullness and completeness of His justification.

For the time being he was cured, but his career was

blighted. Kind relatives provided him with a small income, and he retired into the country. In order to be near his brother John, a Fellow of Caius College, Cambridge, he settled at Huntingdon. Here he made friends with the Rev. William Unwin, a tutor, and his wife, and soon was admitted into their household as a boarder. With their son, William Unwin, who afterwards took Orders, he maintained for years an intimate correspondence ; and with Mrs. Unwin there sprang up a close and deep friendship which was to last for nearly forty years.

When her husband died, as the result of a fall from his horse, she and Cowper set up house together—a situation which to them, pure souls, was never embarrassed, and against which even scandalous tongues could find no evil word. They seem to have regarded one another as brother and sister. Mrs. Unwin (" Mary " as he called her always) tended the frail poet with the tenderest solicitude ; and death alone separated them.

The place chosen for their abode was the village of Olney, in Buckinghamshire ; and here, by the river Ouse (which figures so prominently in Cowper's verse) they spent twenty years of great quiet and retirement—years which, in spite of recurring attacks of melancholia, were probably the happiest in the poet's life. In gardening and country walks by his beloved river, and religious exercises, and the care of animal pets, he found restful and satisfying recreation. He was fully content with the quiet joys of the river-bank, the garden, and the winter fireside.

Olney itself was not an attractive place, being foggy and damp ; but the pair, who had similar Evangelical interests, were drawn thither by the fact that the curate

of the little town was the well-known John Newton. This famous divine became Cowper's spiritual director, and is charged by some writers with increasing his melancholy by his stern unbending Calvinism. He probably benefited the poet quite as much as he injured him. For he set him to visit the poor, and such kindly visits of charitable purpose would help to take the hypochondriac out of himself, and bring him into touch with the thoughts and needs of others.

Since his conversion Cowper had written nothing ; and it was not until he had been at Olney fifteen years that he began to write again—first, hymns in conjunction with Newton, and gradually, miscellaneous poetry. His first volume of verse, containing *Truth, Error*, etc. (subjects suggested by Mrs. Unwin) was issued in 1782, with a preface by Newton, and had no great success.

Before his next volume appeared, an inspiring influence came into his life in the person of a Lady Austen, a "society" widow of much vivacity, who settled for a time with Cowper and Mrs. Unwin. Under her inspiration *John Gilpin* and *The Task* (a long poem of meditations upon almost every conceivable subject) were written, before some disagreement broke up the hastily formed friendship. When published, *The Task* at once brought its writer fame and honour.

Lady Austen's place in the family circle was soon afterwards taken by Lady Hesketh, a sister of his cousin Theodora. She encouraged the pair to move to Weston, a more pleasing spot in the same neighbourhood. During his eight years here, Cowper wrote many of his shorter poems, but again in a fit of madness tried to kill himself. He was nursed round again to

health, but was now sixty years of age, and was unable to throw off the deepening mental gloom which gradually settled down upon him. His faithful attendant, Mrs. Unwin, was no longer able to rouse him from his lethargy and low spirits, having herself become a paralytic ; and Lady Hesketh's health also gave way, and she could not fill the gap.

Now, however, as always in Cowper's life, good Samaritans were not lacking ; and though he survived Mrs. Unwin nearly four years, the kindness of relatives and friends sheltered the poor wreck until his death at East Dereham in 1800. During these last sad years of his life, the poet wrote little except stray verses, including his last poem of despair, *A Castaway*, in which he compares himself with some poor wretch hopelessly floating after shipwreck in mid-ocean until engulfed in the waves :—

No voice divine the storm allay'd,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perish'd each alone :
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.

III

We have said that as Churchman, poet and letter-writer, William Cowper presents an interesting study. Let us glance at him in his character as *Churchman*. In religion, his history is that of many another who has lived a somewhat careless life, and has suddenly been awakened by the Evangelical message to realise the value of his soul in God's sight. This man was but one of thousands who were touched by the Evangelical Revival. Won for life to the cause of personal religion,

he indirectly played no mean part in the movement—he became, indeed, its poet.

Cowper's religion would be interesting to us, were it only for the fact that it brings us into touch with John Newton. Newton, as we have seen, was one of the most extraordinary members of that extraordinary band of Evangelical Churchmen who, in a careless and profligate age, set themselves against public opinion, and gave themselves in grim earnestness to win souls, and to awaken Englishmen to a sense of the seriousness of life.

Cowper's writings not only throw much light upon John Newton, but give us some vivid pictures of the religious life of the times. As a protest against the prevailing frivolity, strict Evangelicals eschewed cards, dancing and plays; and the poet gives us in a letter a glimpse of how large a part religious exercises played in the daily life at Olney. Breakfast—Scripture reading—attendance at Church (service being held twice daily)—quiet recreation—conversation or music—tea—a walk—reading or conversation—supper—hymns or sermon—reading and family prayers. This was the order of each day.

Cowper's poems, in their satirical presentment of some clerical types of the time, are strongly flavoured with this Puritan spirit. The writer is merciless against the hunting or musical parson. To our minds to-day the severity of the following lines seems hardly merited:—

Oh, laugh or mourn with me the rueful jest,
A cassock'd huntsman and a fiddling priest!
He from Italian songsters takes his cue:
Set Paul to music, he shall quote him too.
He takes the field. The master of the pack
Cries—Well done, saint! and claps him on the back.

Is this the path to sanctity ? Is this
 To stand a way-mark in the road to bliss ?
 Himself a wanderer from the narrow way,
 His silly sheep, what wonder if they stray ?
 Go, cast your Orders at your bishop's feet,
 Send your dishonoured gown to Monmouth-street !
 The sacred function in your hands is made—
 Sad sacrilege !—no function but a trade !

Occiduuus is a pastor of renown,
 When he has pray'd and preach'd the sabbath down,
 With wire and catgut he concludes the day,
 Quav'ring and semi-quavering care away.
 The full concerto swells upon your ear ;
 All elbows shake. Look in, and you would swear
 The Babylonian tyrant with a nod
 Had summon'd them to serve his golden god.
 So well that thought th' employment seems to suit,
 Psalt'ry and sackbut, dulcimer and flute.
 Oh fie ! 'tis evangelical and pure !
 Observe each face, how sober and demure !
 Ecstasy sets her stamp on every mien ;
 Chins fall'n, and not an eye-ball to be seen.
 Still I insist, though music heretofore
 Has charm'd me much (not e'en Occiduuus more)
 Love, joy, and peace, make harmony more sweet
 For Sabbath evenings, and perhaps more sweet.

Will not the sickliest sheep of ev'ry flock
 Resort to this example as a rock ?
 There stand, and justify the fair abuse
 Of Sabbath hours with plausible excuse ?
 If apostolic gravity be free
 To play the fool on Sundays, why not we ?
 If he the tinkling harpsichord regards
 As inoffensive, what offence in cards ?
 Strike up the fiddles ; let us all be gay !
 Laymen have leave to dance, if parsons play.

But if the poet lashed such clergy with a somewhat merciless severity, the age was not lacking in clerics who deserved all the censure with which he could visit them. Amongst others, Cowper vents his displeasure

upon the clerical magistrate whose sense of justice is dulled by cupidity or sloth ; the divine who obsequiously courts noblemen with a view to a bishopric ; the nobleman's chaplain who carefully avoids giving a definite opinion upon any subject for fear of causing offence ; and the curate who enjoys sweet slumber while " his tedious rector is drawling o'er his head."

Among his many letters is one upon Country Congregations, in which he inveighs against some of the abuses of the times. Some country churches are ruinous ; others are in good order, the only sign of anything " unseemly or ruinous " being the parson, who is clad in " a surplice as dirty as a farmer's frock." Young people make posies during the service, or crack nuts ; their elders " scream themselves hoarse in making the responses." And the whole performance of divine service is at the mercy of the squire, whose creature the vicar is. Until he has taken his seat in the chancel, the bell must go on tolling, even if the congregation be kept waiting an hour ; and the length of the sermon is measured by his will.

But Cowper does not confine himself to criticism or sarcasm when he writes of Church matters. In lines of some power he describes his ideal priest :—

There stands the messenger of truth : there stands
The legate of the skies !—His theme divine,
His office sacred, his credentials clear.
By him the violated law speaks out
Its thunders : and by him, in strains as sweet
As angels use, the gospel whispers peace.
He establishes the strong, restores the weak,
Reclaims the wanderer, binds the broken heart,
And, armed himself in panoply complete
Of heavenly temper, furnishes with arms,
Bright as his own, and trains, by every rule
Of holy discipline, to glorious war,
The sacramental host of God's elect !

And in a passage of great beauty he describes his own conversion :—

I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since ; with many an arrow deep infix'd
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers. In His side He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth and heal'd and bade me live.

So much for Cowper as a Christian and a Churchman. If his melancholia took, as it usually did, a religious form, it is equally true that the same years of his life were gladdened and sweetened by his simple trust in the Saviour of the world, and by the ministrations of the Church.

IV

As a *poet*, Cowper cannot, of course, be placed in the foremost rank. Some of his shorter pieces, it is true, may fairly be ranked among the classics. No collection of English verse need be ashamed to find room for *John Gilpin*, *The Loss of the Royal George*, *The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk*, or *Boadicea*. And there are many passages of beauty in his longer poems.

But when we have said that, we must go on to confess that *The Task* (which made him famous), and his other long poems, have little interest now except so far as they afford us pictures of contemporary life and thought. They are too obviously didactic to be works of art. *Ars est celare artem*, and Cowper could not hide the fact that he was preaching. The poems were sermons, and were meant to be sermons. It was a difficult matter for Cowper and his spiritual mentor,

John Newton, to decide how far liveliness or worldliness of style was permissible in order to sugar the pill of moral teaching.

If his moral dissertations are somewhat dull reading nowadays, they had a definite message for his own age. In the lifetime of Lord Chesterfield, it was an enormous help to the cause of religion that a man of letters, who had a very wide circle of readers, should show, in all that he penned, that his religion was all in all to him. The value of his writings to the world was immeasurably greater than their intrinsic value as works of art. They reached and influenced a far wider circle than that of *littérateurs* and critics. So great a critic as Canon Overton actually says, Cowper, in his own way, did more for the Evangelical Revival than did either Wesley or Whitefield. That is a strong statement, but probably true enough. Cowper's poems, with their gentle fire of religious inspiration, must have been read and enjoyed at the fireside of many thousands who would not, or could not, attend the meetings of the Evangelical preachers.

In another direction the influence of Cowper's poetry must have been immense—in recalling a generation of artificial tastes to the love of Nature. He stands, as a poet, midway between Pope and Wordsworth; and though his work contains some of the cramped artificiality of Pope, it is an immediate stepping-stone to the natural spontaneity of the Lake poet; and in matter, no less than in style, is this statement true.

As in Wordsworth, so in Cowper, there is an intense love of Nature—not because it may be a poetical thing to love Nature, but because Nature, in all its varied moods, really spelt to the writer life and beauty and joy. Mr. Goldwin Smith, in his little book on Cowper,

quotes a passage from Pope, in which an English landscape is described, and points out that the poet obviously wrote the lines, not under the blue sky of heaven, but in his study with his back to the window, and a copy of the *Georgics* before him !

Not so wrote William Cowper. No man delighted more than he in the most intimate details of country life and country scenery. Read this faithfully detailed picture of sleepy cattle, of a labourer cutting hay from a stack, of a playful dog, of a woodman smoking his pipe !

The cattle mourn in corners, where the fence
Screens them, and seem half-petrified to sleep
In unrecumbent sadness. There they wait
Their wonted fodder ; not like hungering man,
Fretful if unsupplied ; but silent, meek,
And patient of the slow-paced swain's delay.
He from the stack carves out the accustomed load,
Deep-plunging, and again deep-plunging oft,
His broad keen knife into the solid mass :
Smooth as a wall the upright remnant stands,
With such undeviating and even force
He severs it away : no needless care,
Lest storms should upset the leaning pile
Deciduous, or its own unbalanced weight.
Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcern'd
The cheerful haunts of man ; to wield the axe
And drive the wedge in yonder forest drear,
From morn to eve his solitary task.
Shaggy, and lean, and shrewd, with pointed ears
And tail cropp'd short, half lurcher and half cur,
His dog attends him. Close behind his heel
Now creeps he slow ; and now, with many a frisk
Wide-scampering, snatches up the drifted snow
With ivory teeth, or ploughs it with his snout ;
Then shakes his powder'd coat, and barks for joy.
Heedless of all his pranks, the sturdy churl
Moves right toward the mark ; nor stops for aught
But now and then with pressure of his thumb
To adjust the fragrant charge of a short tube,
That fumes beneath his nose : the trailing cloud
Streams far behind him, scenting all the air.

If the art of such extraordinarily faithful descriptions is a humble art, it is yet a very real one. One could quote many such passages. They have their place, and their value, in English poetry ; and it may at least be open to doubt if we should have had Wordsworth if Cowper had not led the way into the simple joys and beauties of the rural life.

V

But it is in quite another branch of literature that Cowper really excelled—the art of *letter-writing*. Some critics place him, as a letter-writer, on a par with Byron, Lamb, Walpole and Southey ; others boldly place him above them all, as the first of English letter-writers.

Certainly for spontaneity, freedom from affectation, vivacity, and general interest, his letters take a very high rank. For this poor weakling, whose mind was often plunged into depths of melancholy, was by nature the most cheerful of mortals. His normal correspondence (though there is, of course, much written by him in despondent mood) bubbles over with high spirits and pure enjoyment of life. Everything pleases him—his pet animals (and at different times he possessed pigeons, pigs, hares, dogs and kittens), his friends and their peculiarities, his greenhouse and garden, his surroundings and local scenery ; everything is ideal ! He can jest even of his melancholia when it has left him for a season. He says that he “ rises like an infernal frog out of Acheron covered with the ooze and mud of melancholy ”—and he dubs his melancholy “ Mr. Blue-devil.”

And if it be wondered at that this recluse with his

extraordinarily limited sphere of life and his extraordinarily uneventful career, could write letters of interest at all, let us remember (as a writer in the *Spectator* has lately reminded us) that Cowper had the very two conditions which are absolutely necessary for the best letter-writing—isolation and leisure. For lack of these two essentials the age of letter-writing has vanished. In this age of penny post and countless post-cards, ten hurried scrawls take the place of the one long letter lovingly written and carefully composed as a revelation of the writer's self, and an opening of his heart. How many modern letters let us into the inner chamber of the writer's soul?

Let three specimens from Cowper's pen suffice. The first (in the poet's lighter style) is a picture of how a political candidate once sought his vote and favour :—

As when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its way into creeks and holes of rocks, which in its calmer state it never reaches, in like manner the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchard Side, where in general we live as undisturbed by the political element as shrimps and cockles that have been accidentally deposited in some hollow beyond the watermark, by the usual dashing of the waves. We were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when to our unspeakable surprise a mob appeared before the window ; a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys bellowed, and the maid announced Mr. Grenville. Puss was unfortunately let

out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door, as the only possible way of approach.

Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affront, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at the window than be absolutely excluded. In a minute, the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour were filled. Mr. Grenville, advancing toward me, shook me by the hand with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he, and as many more as could find chairs, were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the less, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, the draper, addressing himself to me, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion, by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which being not sufficient as it should seem for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he suspended from his buttonhole. The boys halloo'd, the dogs scampered, puss scampered, and the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew.

The second specimen is characteristic of Cowper's more serious vein :—

Mrs. Unwin has made known her whole case to Mr. Gregson, whose opinion of it has been very consolatory to me ; he says indeed it is a case perfectly out of the reach of all human aid, but at the same time not at all dangerous. Constant pain is a sad grievance, whatever part is affected, and she is hardly ever free from an aching head, as well as an uneasy side, but patience is an anodyne of God's own preparation, and of that He gives her largely.

The French, who, like all lively folk, are extreme in everything, are such in their zeal for freedom ; and if it were possible to make so noble a cause ridiculous, their manner of promoting it could not fail to do so. Princes and Peers reduced to a level with their own lackeys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Differences of rank and subordination are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well-being of society ; but what we mean by fanaticism in religion is exactly that which animates their politics : and unless time should sober them, they will, after all, be an unhappy people. Perhaps it deserves not much to be wondered at, that at their first escape from tyrannic shackles they should act extravagantly, and treat their kings as they have sometimes treated their idol. To these, however, they are reconciled in due time again, but their respect for monarchy is at an end. They want nothing now but a little English sobriety, and that they want extremely. I heartily wish them some wit in their anger, for it were a great pity that so many millions should be miserable for want of it.

The third specimen (the reader must be warned or the fact may escape him !) is in rhyme. It is written to John Newton, and would suggest that the poet's relationship with that gentleman was not uniformly of the most solemn description :—

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—I am going to send, that when you have read, you may scratch your head, and say, I suppose, there's nobody knows whether what I have got be verse or not ;—by the tune and the time, it ought to be rhyme, but if it be, did you ever see, of late or of yore, such a ditty before ?

I have writ “ Charity,” not for popularity, but as well as I could, in hopes to do good ; and if the Reviewer should say “ to be sure the gentleman's Muse wears Methodist shoes, you may know by her pace and talk about grace, that she and her bard have little regard for the taste and fashions, and ruling passions, and hoidening play, of the modern day ; and though she assume a borrowed plume, and now and then wear a tittering air, 'tis only her plan to catch, if she can, the giddy and gay, as they go that way, by a production on a new construction : she has baited her trap, and hopes to snap all that may come with a sugar plum.”—His opinion in this will not be amiss ; 'tis what I intend, my principal end, and, if I succeed, and folks should read, till a few are brought to a serious thought, I shall think I am paid for all I have said and all I have done, though I have run many a time, after a rhyme, as far as from hence to the end of my sense, and by hook or crook, write another book, if I live and am here, another year.

I have heard before of a room with a floor laid upon springs, and such like things, with so much art in

every part, that when you went in you were forced to begin a minuet pace, with an air and a grace, swimming about, now in and now out, with a deal of state, in a figure of eight, without pipe, or string, or any such thing ; and now I have writ, in a rhyming fit, what will make you dance, and, as you advance, will keep you still, though against your will, dancing away, alert and gay, till you come to an end of what I had penn'd, which that you may do, ere Madam and you are quite worn out with jigging about, I take my leave, and here you receive a bow profound, down to the ground, from your humble me.—W.C.

There we must leave our poet, gladder and better folk for having come across him ; and confident that as long as Englishmen value adversity bravely faced and limitations bravely borne, as long as they rate highly in a man those characteristics which call out in others deep friendship and loving attachment, and as long as they count a pure and lofty Christianity the highest good—so long will William Cowper find an honoured niche upon English shelves.

BEILBY PORTEUS, BISHOP OF LONDON

I

Eighteenth century bishops—Beilby Porteus' career, a forerunner of modern episcopal activities—His *Primary Visitation Charge* to the London Diocese—Its references to Bishop Lowth, non-residence of clergy, scarcity of Sunday services, Sunday-schools, Church singing—The Bishop's efforts for the better observance of Holy Days, etc., for the anti-slavery movement, and for Foreign Missions, especially the S.P.G. plantations in the West Indies.

HARD things have been said—and written—of the second half of the eighteenth century. Two examples of stern criticism will suffice :—

Bishoprics were given either for political services, or as the reward of apologetic or theological writing. The bishops were not expected to be organisers of religious energy, or earnest in pastoral work, and to such a point did some of them push this theory that they rarely appeared in their dioceses at all.¹

While emphatically avoiding the extreme statements and sweeping assertions which have been too often made concerning the Hanoverian clergy, it is impossible to deny that many of the bishops were excessively worldly, culpably idle and negligent, and too often merely self-seeking political partisans.²

The evidence for such statements is overwhelming. And yet it is not for us to judge even Hanoverian

¹ Wakeman's *History of the Church of England*.

² C. S. Carter's *English Church in the Eighteenth Century* (p. 41).

bishops ; for they were largely what their own generation expected and accepted contentedly enough. It is difficult to know quite what was cause and what was effect in the spiritual sloth of the age ; difficult to know if the bishops were the cause or rather the result of the prevailing unspirituality. Much can be said for the latter view ; in which case our condemnation dare hardly be in stronger terms than to say that they did not rise above the standard of their times.

There were exceptions to the rule. And—matters standing as they did—we are constrained to a greater admiration for those few prelates who rose above the conventional mercenary or literary conception of their office, and sought to be shepherds of Christ's flock. Of these the most honoured will always be Wilson, of Sodor and Man, who, in spite of repeated offers of rich advancement and pluralities, held to his island diocese with its £300 a year for fifty-eight years of incessant pastoral toil.

But Thomas Wilson died in the middle of the century, and by that time the number of spiritually-minded prelates had sensibly declined.

In the latter half of the century the palm for episcopal activity must be awarded to Dr. Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London from 1787 to 1808. From his position he had far wider opportunities of influence and service than Bishop Wilson ; and, rising above the mercenary spirit which dominated his times, he used his episcopate not as a means of worldly enrichment or self-aggrandisement, but as a sphere of strenuous and self-denying labour.

The great Bishop Wilberforce is sometimes said to have revived the modern conception of the episcopal office with its endless round of toil and responsibility ;



BEILBY PORTEUS
FROM A DRAWING BY H. EDRIDGE
1809

but perhaps it would be fairer to look further back to this Bishop of London who, in an age when Churchmen were, for the most part, exceedingly worldly, sought honestly and fearlessly to advance his Master's cause with all his power.

A short study of his life and doings should be interesting, as bringing us into touch, not only with an exceptional man, but also with many characteristic movements of the century.

II

Born at York in 1731, Beilby Porteus was educated at that city and at Ripon until he proceeded to Christ's College, Cambridge, of which institution he became Fellow and remained one until 1762. In that year he became domestic chaplain to Archbishop Secker, from whose methodical work and charity he doubtless learnt much. The Archbishop (whose biography he afterwards wrote) gave him various small livings in Kent; in 1767 he became Rector of Lambeth; in 1769 a Royal Chaplain, and Master of St. Cross, Winchester; in 1776 Bishop of Chester; and in 1787 Bishop of London, ruling that diocese until his death in 1808. All his ministerial life he was an exceedingly hard worker—at sixty-four years of age he still rose daily at five—and exercised real influence for good.

The portion of his life which will most interest the reader is his London episcopate. He found the diocese in a terrible state of neglect and unspirituality, and set himself to stem the heavy tide of sloth and worldliness. He sympathised deeply with the activities of the Evangelicals, though he did not commit himself to their views; keenly advocated the Sunday-school system, still in its infancy; was a warm supporter of Foreign

Missions, of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and of the Anti-Slave Trade campaign ; and worked hard to promote a better observance of Sundays, and of Lent, which had long been ignored in his diocese.

III

What courage and zeal it required in an ecclesiastical reformer to support these various movements may be seen in some degree from the state of the diocese of London, and of the Church at large, as reflected in his *Primary Visitation Charge* in 1790.

The bishop opens his charge by explaining that he had deferred his visitation for two years until he had been able to investigate diocesan matters fully. He goes on to refer, in terms of regret, to the death of his predecessor. Bishop Lowth had been a cultured gentleman and scholar of the old school, to whose credit it is recorded that on a certain occasion when he met John Wesley at a dinner-party, he refused to sit above him, saying " Mr. Wesley, may I be found sitting at your feet in another world." He admired in another the evangelistic zeal which he would readily have confessed was not his own. It is significant that in Porteus' eulogy of the bishop (who was so respected in his day that he was offered the Primacy) there is no mention of any episcopal activity on his part except opposition to one particular abuse in the matter of clerical resignations. The eulogy runs in the following terms :—

We may justly admire the universality of that genius which could apply itself and with almost equal success, to so many different branches of literature ; to poetry, to grammar, to criticism, to

theology, to Oriental learning. In each of these he has displayed the talents of a master, and the originality of the true genius. But in that admirable work, the *Prelections on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, he has described and illustrated the distinct properties and excellencies of each particular species of that poetry with such admirable taste and skill, with such exuberant richness of imagery, such variety, copiousness, elegance, and rotundity of style, as few writers have ever yet equalled in a language not their own.

With such various and distinguished talents in almost every branch of literature ; with a conduct perfectly inoffensive and irreproachable ; with a temper naturally mild and even ; with manners the most gentle, unassuming, and conciliating, it can be no wonder if he attracted the notice and the patronage of the great, whose friendship gradually raised him through the various honours of his profession to that high station which he was so peculiarly qualified to dignify and adorn.

So much for the apostolic labours of Dr. Porteus' predecessor ! In such language could be described the work of the bishop of the greatest city in the world ! It is a picture which might serve equally well as a portrait of many of his episcopal contemporaries.

The rest of the Charge is taken up with the good bishop's demand upon his clergy for urgently needed reforms.

First of all, he tilts against the current evil of *non-residence*. Non-residence (which went hand in hand with the prevalent system of pluralities), was, of course, one of the great abuses of the day. It was a common thing for an ecclesiastic to accumulate several

benefices, and put a curate at starvation wage into each, whilst he himself rarely, or even never, came near his cures. Archbishop Secker himself, when Bishop of Bristol, held also the rectory of St. James's, Piccadilly, and a prebend in Durham Cathedral! Later, he held the deanery of St. Paul's in conjunction with the see of Oxford! Bishop Watson of Llandaff, the worst pluralist of all, drew the income of two benefices in Shropshire, two in Leicestershire, two in his diocese, and three in Huntingdonshire—in each of which he maintained a curate. This bishop is said to have entered his diocese but once or twice during his thirteen years' occupancy of the See. What wonder if the lesser fry among the clergy, when opportunity offered, followed such examples, and, with little thought as to the performance of duties, looked upon preferments in the Church chiefly as the reward of merit.

To return to Bishop Porteus' charge — he has observed, he says, that "many excellent parochial clergymen reside constantly on their benefices; but, alas, this is not always the case." Much too large a proportion lived away from their cures to the great detriment of their parishioners' welfare and morals.

The prevalence of the evil¹ is clearly seen from the bishop's somewhat pessimistic tone in deprecating it.

There are, indeed, two impediments to constant residence which cannot easily be surmounted; the first is (what unfortunately prevails in some parts of this diocese) unwholesomeness of situation; the other is the possession of a second benefice. Yet even these will not justify a *total and perpetual*

¹ The Bishop himself had not hesitated, when Bishop of Chester, to continue to hold one of his Kent livings,

absence from your cures. The unhealthiness of many places is of late years, by various improvements, greatly abated, and there are now few so circumstanced as not to admit of residence there in *some* part of the year, without any danger to the constitution.

Two livings (he continues) were sometimes granted to one man as a reward for exceptional learning or piety, to the intent that by exercising his exceptional talents over a wider sphere he should have a wider influence for good ; but, even so, such clergy were legally bound to preach thirteen sermons in each parish a year, and exercise hospitality therein for two months.

Whoever then possesses this privilege, will feel himself bound in conscience to act up to the spirit and the conditions of it. He will, if possible, reside alternately on *both* his benefices. But if there should be any real and unavoidable impediment to this, he will at least fix his abode constantly on one, and will most clearly see that an entire desertion of *both* his benefices is a violation of duty which nothing can justify, and which cannot be endured.

In the case of clergy with only one benefice, they were requested to let no " temptations of ease, of pleasure, or of mere convenience " lead them to absent themselves from their parishes and entrust them to the charge of others.

The bishop then goes on to deprecate *the scarcity of Sunday services* in the diocese ; and here again his somewhat hopeless tone shows how deeply was engrained the sloth which had led to few services and less preaching.

I observe that in general, throughout the county

of Essex at least, there is service only once in the day. I observe, too, that this has in several parishes been a long-established custom, and therefore I impute no blame to those who have only conformed to that custom. Yet still I conceive they will upon reflection see the necessity of making some improvement in this article. In most other dioceses the practice, I believe, is different. In that at least from which I was removed to this, there were through a very considerable part of it, and that even in the smallest parishes, not only prayers, but a sermon too, both parts of the day. I do not mean to require this from you ; but I do very earnestly recommend it to you, in general, to have a sermon once, and prayers twice in the day, and more especially in those places where this was formerly in practice, and where single duty has been a late innovation. *There* I must beg that the ancient custom may be restored.

He points out how few communicants there are in many parishes, and how few parents send their children to be instructed in the Catechism. For this state of affairs he urges two remedies—regular lectures on the Catechism, and the establishment of Sunday-schools. Afternoon Catechism lectures, the bishop considered, would by their novelty increase attendance at church, and the definite instruction which could then be given on the Lord's Supper would increase the number of communicants.

Sunday-schools were a pet hobby of Dr. Porteus, if we may use the word "hobby" of a very deep and earnest conviction. His alertness to new movements for good may be recognised in the fact that, at the time of this Charge, Sunday-schools had been started

barely ten years. In 1780, Robert Raikes, a Gloucester newspaper proprietor—struck by the ignorance and ill-behaviour of the children in the streets of Gloucester—had, in conjunction with his parish priest, begun a successful Sunday-school, and the movement was soon taken up by the more active clergy. Hannah More (a great friend of Bishop Porteus) laboured hard to establish Sunday-schools in the neighbourhood of Cheddar. The need for them was manifest everywhere. There was, of course, at this time no national system of education. Early in the century some charity-schools had been started for the children of the poor in London, and Robert Nelson, among others, had taken a keen interest in them. But still the religious ignorance of the illiterate poor, and consequently of their children, throughout the country, can hardly be imagined.

The movement met with difficulties. Not only was the general apathy of the times against any serious spiritual effort, but the French Revolution had roused a great fear of any kind of reform, and the new schools were actually accused of spreading atheism and sedition. However, they lived down this charge, and the championship of so great a man as the Bishop of London must have greatly helped to this end.

As thus promoted, the Sunday-school was a somewhat serious thing. The bishop, for instance, suggested that four hours a day would suffice for children engaged in indoor work during the week, whereas in the country, where the children had more fresh air during the week, the hours of study might be longer! The reason for these long hours is found in the fact that Sunday-school scholars of those days had no other education, and were taught on Sundays reading, writing

and arithmetic, as well as religious knowledge. The writer remembers being told by an old woman, whose memory would go back to over seventy years ago, that in her childhood in a Hampshire village Sunday-school was held in the parish church, the boys being taught in the north transept and the girls in the Lady chapel, both boys and girls learning reading and writing as well as the Catechism. The children were in church, roughly speaking, from ten o'clock to the end of the three o'clock evensong—those who came from a distance bringing their dinners with them.

From Sunday-schools the bishop's charge passes to *church psalmody*, and pleads for a restoration of more congregational and sensible singing.

This most pleasing and affecting part of divine service is now (through a large part of the kingdom at least) rendered almost totally useless to the Church of England, where on the contrary one should expect to find it in its highest state of perfection. But from this it is at a great distance indeed. In country parishes it is generally engrossed by a select band of singers, who have been taught by some itinerant master to sing in the worst manner a most wretched set of psalm tunes in three or four parts, so complex, so difficult and so totally void of all true harmony, that it is altogether impossible for any of the congregation to take a part with them, who therefore sit absorbed in silent admiration, or total inattention, without considering themselves as in any degree concerned in what is going forward.

And the bishop closes his address with an earnest appeal to his clergy to remember the dignity and the solemnity of the priestly calling.

IV

We have no space here to follow the good bishop through his manifold activities, interesting as it would be to study his efforts as regards the observance of Good Friday, Lent and Sundays.

Two important features of his work, however, we may briefly notice—his interest in Wilberforce's Anti-Slavery campaign, and his efforts on behalf of Foreign Missions.

For some time before any Act was passed upon the subject, English opposition to slavery had been steadily growing, and the opposition had been sufficiently organised to bring home to the educated Englishman the full horrors of the slave system. A Parliamentary Committee had elicited from witnesses the horrible details of the inhumanity practised aboard slave-ships. In 1783, the Quakers had petitioned against the slave trade; and from that time Clarkson, a young Cambridge man, devoted himself to collecting incriminating evidence. Little by little Pitt, Fox and Wilberforce were won over to the cause of freedom. In 1788, Pitt brought the matter before Parliament, and in 1792 and 1796 Bills in favour of abolishing slavery passed the Commons, and were rejected in the House of Lords. It was not until 1807 (a year after Porteus' death) that the slave trade was abolished; and not until 1833 that slavery itself was made illegal—Wilberforce living just long enough to see the fruit of his labours.

Bishop Porteus lent all his influence to the abolitionists; he attended for nearly a year the meetings of the Parliamentary Committee; and in his writings was continually urging the rights of the slaves to

humaner treatment. In a tract upon the *Beneficial Effects of Christianity* he suggests that the sufferings caused by slavery would be immensely mitigated if trading in slaves were abolished by law. He evidently looks upon it as hopeless to urge, in the face of great vested interests, that the keeping of slaves should be forbidden ; but he urges that if the traffic in slaves were abolished, an ample supply could still be maintained in the plantations and elsewhere by the natural increase of the negroes, provided that they were treated with humanity instead of barbarity.

This brings us to the bishop's interests in *Foreign Missions*. Though born in England himself, and never leaving the country of his birth, he was of parents who had both been born in Virginia ; and this may account for his enthusiasm in the missionary cause. The S.P.G. had been founded in 1701, and the bishop, who was keenly interested in the welfare of negro slaves, worked hard to enlist the favour of the Society in their behalf. Among his *Tracts* (the religious people of the eighteenth century were great believers in tracts, and doubtless they were a great power for good, when there was no other cheap literature) is an *Essay* (written in 1784) *towards a Plan for the more effectual Civilisation and Conversion of the Negro Slaves on the Trust Estate in Barbadoes*. Providence had thrown this estate into the hands of the S.P.G. as trustees, and thus gave it an admirable chance to set an example of missionary effort. The Society had urged its managers to treat the slaves humanely, and had maintained for some years a missionary as "Catechist" on the plantation, to teach the slaves and provide them with divine service on Sundays. To encourage them to use Sundays well, the negroes were allowed to have

Saturday afternoons free for cultivating their own land, and for family affairs.

In spite of this, the catechist had had little or no success. The slaves submitted to baptism, but were merely nominal Christians, showing no material change in their morals or habits of life. In his essay the bishop sets himself to ask, Why this failure, and how can it be remedied ?

Failure was clearly not due to the fact that Africans, as a race, were unfitted to receive Christianity, for the Gospel was meant for all nations. If the Africans were slow-witted, they were not more so than many Englishmen, or than Greenlanders, many of whom had become earnest Christians.

The bishop looks for other reasons of failure than this, and amongst them suggests the following for the Society's consideration.

The catechists employed did not seem, judging from their reports, to be men suited for their task, or to possess the necessary tact, patience and perseverance. Heathen slaves, imported into the plantation from other estates or from Africa, continually tempted the Christian slaves to resume their old heathen practices. The Society, though more gentle than most owners, yet did not take sufficient trouble to raise its slaves from their depressed condition ; dissolute and vicious habits were allowed (even baptised negroes were allowed to have several wives, or to live in open sin), and the evil example of licentious managers helped to make Christianity on the estate little more than a name.

To remedy these evils the bishop made the following suggestions. In addition to the catechist, the Society should maintain an earnest missionary, well qualified

for the particular work, and pay him not less than £200, with residence in Barbadoes College, or £300 if without residence. He should be called "the Guardian of the Negroes," should be responsible for the instruction of the adult negroes, and supervise the teaching of the children by the catechist and the two women assistant-teachers. To this teaching of the youth especial attention should be paid. The adult negroes should not be instructed by English tracts (as had hitherto been the case), but should be systematically taught the chief events of the Scriptures (especially of the Gospels), and the great practical duties of piety, chastity, honesty, patience and obedience. As on French plantations, work might be begun and ended with a short prayer. Prayers should be drawn up for the use of the slaves which would express (and so inculcate) the chief duties of a Christian life, and hymns, attractive to the native love of singing, might be written to answer the same purpose. Both "Guardian" and catechist should mix freely with the slaves in their joys and sorrows, their mournings and their festivities.

Only a small portion of each Sunday—the bishop pointed out—had been used for instruction and worship. As the negroes had looked upon Sunday as their market-day and as a time for recreation, there would be some difficulty in increasing the time set apart for instruction. But it might be done, if marketing were forbidden on Sundays, and if a judicious division of Sundays were made—the earlier hours being allotted to religious duties, and the rest to recreation. Moreover, a respite from an hour's labour every day might surely be allowed for this purpose of instruction to a certain number of slaves in rotation. Much more

serious efforts should be made to check immorality. A regular marriage tie should be encouraged and rewarded, and more humanity shown to negroes before and after childbirth. Married couples should not be separated from one another, or from their children. Instead of being wholly at the mercy of the managers as regards their clothing, food, labour and punishments, the slaves should be under known and fixed laws, with right of appeal against oppression or brutality, so that security of person and property might bring a little happiness into lives hitherto depressed and degraded ; and it might be found possible to allow freedom gradually as a reward for a few of the slaves who were of marked industry and sobriety. In all these matters the *Code Noir* of the French plantation set an admirable example.

An immense and God-given opportunity lay before the Society to train up gradually "a little community of truly Christian Negroes," which by its purity of life and domestic happiness and cheerful labour would be a standing example to influence all the British West Indies.

It would render the Society's plantation a *Model* for all the other planters to follow. It would give it the glory of founding a *New School for Piety and Virtue* in the Atlantic ocean, of raising a noble structure of religion in the western world, of leading the way perhaps to the future conversion and salvation of more than five hundred thousand human beings, with all their countless descendants to the remotest generation.

¶ Less interesting studies in the history of religion might be propounded than to investigate how far

Bishop Porteus's recommendations were carried into effect, and with what lasting result.

Could there be a better spiritual tonic than the story of Beilby Porteus for any Churchman whose spirits may happen to be depressed at the slow progress of religion in England to-day? When we remember that the good bishop, scarcely more than a hundred years ago, hardly dared to hope that his clergy would live in their parishes, or that they would observe Lent, or hold more than one service each Sunday, or venture upon the promotion of Sunday-schools ; and when we remember that it seemed beyond the bounds of all practical politics that a Christian nation should free its slaves ; then surely we may, even the most faint-hearted of us, take courage, and thank God that to the seed sown by His faithful workers in every age He grants even a richer harvest than they dare to hope or pray for.

RICHARD WATSON, BISHOP OF LLANDAFF

I

Latitudinarian and political bishops—Watson's life as told in his *Anecdotes*—His education, and appointment to Professorships of Chemistry and Divinity, and to See of Llandaff—His various interests and neglect of episcopal work—The age's acquiescence in episcopal sloth—The Bishop's indefinite Christianity, and eagerness for preferment—Anecdotes of George III—Story of a Confirmation.

WE have seen, in the preceding chapter how there was a time when with some justice the word *bishop* might stink in the nostrils of English Churchmen. In the eighteenth century, especially in its latter half, the office of a bishop was considered not so much "a good work" as a good position, bringing to its fortunate possessor a large income, an opportunity of learned (or unlearned) leisure, and a standing which stamped its owner, in the eyes of the world, as a success in his profession. In the second half of the century bishops were appointed almost solely for political reasons; indeed, it was largely understood that they were to support the Prime Minister who chose them. And Prime Ministers were very careful to choose men who would not unsettle the comfortable ease of the Established Church, or show any awkward "enthusiasm." The divines appointed were generally scholarly Whigs, whose zeal was largely for a latitudinarian Protestantism and the obtaining of promotion, their views

being so eminently "rational" and vague that few could quarrel with them on any definite principle.

Now and then unavailing protests against this state of things were forthcoming. Bishop Hoadley, a prelate notorious for his laxity of views and practice, who held the see of Bangor for six years without once entering it, had urged that prayer should be an "Address calm and undisturbed, without any Heat, or Flame, or Vehemence, or importunity." To which advice a critic, in a publication meant to rebuke the religious scandals of the age, retorted by drawing up the following somewhat scurrilous prayer, which he suggested might be of use, along Bishop Hoadley's lines of reasoning :—

	<i>A Form to be said over a Dish of Tea, or playing with a Lap-Dog.</i>
Be in a Good Humour.	O Give me Grace, it is Grace I want; Grant me a City House
Hang your Head carelessly on one side.	and a Country House: May I always live Absolutely and Properly, in such a Manner, and to such a Degree: May my lot
Rub one Eye;	fall in the Southernly Parts of Great Britain, where the Air is moderate; and may I never be
Then the other.	forced (God bless his Royal Highness) into the Principality of North Wales. I confess I am unworthy of these Blessings, and so
Yawn.	I have always been: Let me always escape my Deserts, and give me what I do not deserve
Stretch.	for the sake of myself, my Wife and Children. Amen.
Call for your Shoes and the Tea-Kettle.	
Tye your Garters.	

Among the chief evils which roused protests from time to time were two which naturally went hand in hand: *plurality*, by which an incumbent might hold

several livings, often at a great distance from one another ; and *non-residence*, by which he might reside where he willed, so long as he placed an ill-paid curate in each of his parishes. Bishops would gaily hold a deanery or canonry, with a living or two, all in different parts of England, in addition to their see ; and lesser dignitaries and parish priests naturally followed suit, when they had the chance. In charge of their livings such clergy would place curates, themselves rarely visiting their flocks except to receive tithe, whilst bishops of this kidney rarely visited the parishes of their diocese, and even sometimes resided outside it altogether.

Every historian of the eighteenth century has this story to tell, and all quote one particular bishop as the prince of non-resident pluralists—Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff for thirty-four years, from 1782 to 1816. This divine never lived in his diocese at all, and visited it only upon rare occasions !

Few autobiographies constitute such vivid mirrors of their writers' character as the bishop's very candid *Anecdotes of My Life*, in which, at the end of his long life, he puts forth his career, his ambitions, his disappointments. In our efforts, as a Church, to enter deeply into the spirit of repentance and hope,¹ we could hardly find a better book than this to reveal to us the past neglect for which we need to offer repentance ; nor could any book give us a much more real ground for hope if we venture to compare the episcopal life which it presents to our gaze with the multifarious activities and the revived spirituality of our modern episcopate. Let us dip, therefore, into Bishop Watson's

¹ This chapter was written soon after the National Mission in 1916, the keynote of which was a call to "Repentance and Hope."

autobiography to learn, if we can, what may deepen our repentance for the past in this matter, and our hope for the future—at the same time acknowledging in fairness that, though Watson represented a class, he was confessedly, with the possible exception of Hoadley, the worst specimen that could be chosen by way of illustration.

II

Richard Watson was born in 1737 at Heversham, in Westmorland, where his father was headmaster of the local grammar school for nearly forty years. After attending this school, the future bishop went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, as a sizar, at the age of seventeen. From the beginning he was an ambitious boy; and as he knew that his share of his father's patrimony was but £300, his ambition made him industrious. After two and a half years' residence (without a vacation!) he was elected to a scholarship. He studied Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and, according to his own account, "made considerable proficiency in mathematics and natural philosophy."

During his residence at Cambridge he paid a short visit to Kendal, where his elder brother was a curate. This brother was "a man of lively parts" who injured his constitution by "convivial festivity," and died at the age of thirty-three, leaving debts for his brother Richard to pay—a circumstance which increased, if possible, the assiduity of that gentleman's studies. His college mornings were given to mathematics, and the afternoons to classics, passages of Greek and Latin orators being learnt by heart. College dinner in those days was at twelve.

In 1759 he took his degree, being placed Second

Wrangler (he claimed that apart from favouritism he would have been first), and in the following year was elected Fellow of Trinity. At this time he was offered a chaplaincy to a factory at Bencoolen, and had thoughts of accepting it; but the Master of the College sent for him, and dissuaded him from entertaining the idea. "You are far too good," he said, "to die of drinking punch in the torrid zone!"

This book throws a startling light upon the methods by which some of the high posts in Universities and Church were filled. In 1764 the Professorship of Chemistry fell vacant. Young Watson, never behind-hand in vigour or ambition, determined to apply for it. An eminent physician in London, who had also decided to be a candidate, gave way before the applicant who had the advantage of being on the spot; and Watson was duly elected. This is his amazing story of his qualifications for the post:—

At the time this honour was conferred upon me, I knew nothing at all of Chemistry, had never read a syllable on the subject, nor seen a single experiment in it; but I was tired with mathematics and natural philosophy, and the *vehementissima gloriæ cupido* stimulated me to try my strength in a new pursuit, and the kindness of the University (it was always kind to me) animated me to very extraordinary exertions. I sent immediately after my election for an operator to Paris; I buried myself as it were in my laboratory, at least as much as my other avocations would permit; and in fourteen months from my election, I read a course of chemical lectures to a very full audience, consisting of persons of all ages and degrees, in the University.

There was no stipend attached to this Chair ; but it was a step towards fame and preferment ; and as such Watson sought it. Certainly he could not be accused of making it a sinecure. For months and years he gave lectures each day at his college, beginning at 8 a.m., spent four or five hours with private pupils, and five or six more in his laboratory, besides presiding in the Sophs schools.

His assiduity was soon rewarded. In 1771 Dr. Rutherford, the Regius Professor of Divinity, died. Watson had read almost as little theology as he had chemistry before his election to his present Chair ; but he had long ago decided that he was the man to succeed Rutherford. Only slightly daunted by the fact that the latter had died a few years earlier than was expected and before Watson had had time to study his subject, the latter, with an intrepidity worthy of a better cause, prepared for the fray.

I knew as much divinity as could reasonably be expected from a man whose course of studies had been directed to, and whose time had been fully occupied in other pursuits ; but with this *curta suppelex* in theology to take possession of the first professional chair in Europe, seemed too daring an attempt even for my intrepidity.

However, not being of a temper to be discouraged by difficulties, and not observing that any man of distinguished talents stood forward as candidate for the professorship except Dr. Gordon, and thinking that I would labour day and night till I was qualified for the office, if I were appointed to it, and knowing that I was sufficiently versed in dialectics, from having presided for many years in the philosophical

schools, I determined to sound the University, and if I found the general sense of the body favourable to my pretensions, to become a candidate.

Fortune as usual, favoured the brave, and he was duly elected at the age of thirty-four.

If he could not bring learning to his new Chair, the new Professor could bring what so often has to serve as the understudy of learning in matters theological—prejudice. He laboured as assiduously at learning theology as he had in learning chemistry, and in doing so, he tells us :—

I reduced the study of divinity into as narrow a compass as I could, for I determined to study nothing but my Bible, being much unconcerned about the opinions of councils, fathers, churches, bishops, and other men, as little inspired as myself. This mode of proceeding being opposite to the general one, and especially to that of the Master of Peterhouse, who was a great reader, he used to call me *αὐτοδίδακτος*, the self-taught divine. The Professor of Divinity had been nicknamed *Malleus Hæreticorum* ; it was thought to be his duty to demolish every opinion which militated against what is called the orthodoxy of the Church of England. Now my mind was wholly unbiased ; I had no prejudice against, no predilection for, the Church of England ; but a sincere regard for the *Church of Christ*, and an insuperable objection to every degree of dogmatical intolerance. I never troubled myself with answering any arguments which the opponents in the divinity schools brought against the articles of the church, nor ever admitted their authority as decisive of a difficulty ; but I used on such occasions

to say to them, holding the New Testament in my hand, "*En sacrum codicem !*"

His views, and he gloried in the fact, coincided as nearly as possible with those of Bishop Hoadley, whose latitudinarianism had caused much uneasiness in the preceding generation, and had helped to pave the way to preferment for such professors as our friend.

It must be confessed that Dr. Watson was thorough and consistent in his liberal principles, and whilst he disapproved of anything like subscription to creeds or articles among Anglicans, was also willing to acknowledge Unitarians as Christians, and to relax the disqualifications against Dissenters and even against Roman Catholics, if the latter would content themselves under the Hanoverian regime.

Two years after this appointment he married the daughter of a Westmorland gentleman. The following day he took possession of a sinecure rectory in North Wales, procured for him from the Bishop of St. Asaph by the Duke of Grafton, who was his steady friend ; this living he afterwards exchanged for a prebend in Ely Cathedral. It was the first of many such preferments which he was to hold in plurality. A few years later he was given the incumbency of Knaptoft, in Leicestershire, for services rendered to the Rutland family. In the following year, 1782, another step in his ambition was realised, and he was offered the see of Llandaff.

Why he was offered the see, he tells us quite frankly ; and his story is a sufficient commentary upon the Church life of the age.

In this manner did I acquire a bishopric. But I have no great reason to be proud of the promotion ;

for I think I owed it not to any regard which he who gave it me had to the zeal and industry with which I had for many years discharged the functions, and fulfilled the duties, of an academic life, but to the opinion which, from my Sermon, he had erroneously entertained, that I was a warm, and might become a useful partisan. Lord Shelburne, indeed, had expressed to the Duke of Grafton his expectation, that I would occasionally write a pamphlet for their administration. The Duke did me justice in assuring him that he had perfectly mistaken my character ; that though I might write on an abstract question, concerning government or the principles of legislation, it would not be with a view to assisting any administration.

I had written in support of the principles of the Revolution, because I thought their principles useful to the State, and I saw them vilified and neglected ; I had taken part with the people in their petitions against the influence of the Crown, because I thought that influence would destroy the Constitution, and I saw that it was increasing ; I had opposed the supporters of the American war, because I thought that war not only to be inexpedient, but unjust. But all this was done from my own sense of things, and without the least view of pleasing any party : I did, however, happen to please a party, and they made me a bishop.

III

Before one of Watson's industry and powers of application lay a magnificent opportunity to use his undoubted capability for the advancement of the

Church in Wales and for reviving the spirituality of his own neglected diocese.

But about such matters as these the ordinary Georgian bishop simply did not care. The new Bishop of Llandaff was prepared to be industrious still—but not in his diocese. His activities, indeed, were many and varied. He still held his Cambridge professorship and his livings. He wrote tracts in defence of Christianity—one against Gibbon being especially valuable. He maintained his interest in chemical experiments, and was consulted upon these and kindred matters by State departments.¹ He was anxious, too, to effect some improvement in the stipends of the badly-paid lower clergy; and took no small interest in politics, frequently, when any important matter was afoot, sending suggestions or schemes to some leading minister or politician of the day. But of episcopal activities, as we know them to-day, there was nothing. Nor is this really surprising, since Watson's views upon the episcopal office were of the lowest, and he held that the continuance or abolition of episcopacy was a question scarcely worth discussion. Urging, in his autobiography, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, he points out that men opposed the repeal from dread of the possible abolition of the Church of England's constitution; and he comments upon such a contingency in these words:—

Let it be admitted that, at some distant period of which no man can form a reasonable conjecture, the House of Lords would, by compulsion or choice,

¹ e.g. in 1786 the Government asked his advice as to the possible increase of the strength of gunpowder; the Bishop's suggestions were carried out, and he claimed to have heard at a later date that before long they were saving the nation £100,000 a year.

agree with the House of Commons, and that the King would agree with them both, in establishing Presbytery in the room of Episcopacy—what then ? Why then the present form of the Church of England would be changed into another ! And is this all ? this the catastrophe of so many tragical forebodings—this the issue of so many improbable contingencies—this the result of so much unchristian contention—this a cause for continuing distinctions by which the persons and properties of peaceful citizens are exposed to the fiery zeal of a senseless rabble ? A great *Protestant* nation does not return to *Popery* ; a great *Christian* nation does not apostatize to *Paganism* or *Mahometanism* ; it simply adopts an ecclesiastical constitution different from what it had before.

So—such episcopal pursuits as Confirmation and the rule of a diocese in the Church of God being quite unnecessary to truly liberal divines, except so far as conveniences or public opinion might demand them—the new Bishop of Llandaff continued to reside at Cambridge for the next five years. In 1787 the doctors recommended a change of scene, and the bishop engaged a deputy-professor for his divinity Chair. Twenty years later, in 1806, he was still doing his work as Regius Professor through a deputy, and explaining in a letter how impossible it would be for him to resign the Chair and its emoluments :—

I cannot resign the emolument of the office, for even with it, I am worse provided for than any of my brethren, and without it, I should not have a church income of fifteen hundred a year at the most !

Accordingly, having appointed his deputy at Cambridge, he obeyed his doctors by retiring—not into Wales, but into Westmorland ! Church work might injure his health, and therefore his activities were forced into healthier channels. Again, let us read his own complacent account, written in 1809, of this appalling situation :—

The medical faculty having represented to me, in the most serious terms, the necessity of abandoning all literary pursuits, if I wished to preserve my health and life ; and knowing that, if I lived in Cambridge, the *genius loci* would not suffer me to abandon them ; and having no place of residence in my diocese, nor a desire to procure a change of situation by a prostitution of principle ; and being conscious, moreover, that the activity of my mind would not suffer me to dream away life without employment, I turned my attention to the improvement of land. I thought that the improvement of a man's fortune by cultivating the earth was the most useful and honourable mode of providing for a family : and I believed also that it would be the most likely mode of restoring my constitution. I have now been several years occupied as an improver of land and a planter of trees. My health is better now (1809) than it was, but the original disorder has never left me ; and I have been so successful in these pursuits, that I am now under no uneasiness as to the provision which I thought it my duty to make for my children, my wishes on that point having been always moderate ; and I feel such satisfaction at this moment in having, by my own exertions, wholly counteracted the effects which might otherwise have

followed the neglect I have experienced from the Court, or from its ministers, or from both, that I sincerely pity, and cordially forgive the littleness of mind which, in some one or other, has occasioned it.

On his estate at Westmorland the bishop accordingly lived, as any farmer or country gentleman might live who was interested in trees and agriculture, and intent upon saving a fortune. Eight months a year he passed in this rural solitude, spending most of the other four at his London house. Once or twice in every four or five years he seems to have paid a flying visit to his diocese.

So far from conceiving that this might be conduct unseemly in a successor of the Apostles, the good bishop dwells upon his method of life with no small satisfaction :—

I have now spent above twenty years in this delightful country ; but my time has not been spent in field-diversions, in idle visitings, in county bickerings, in indolence or intemperance : no, it has been spent, partly in supporting the religion and constitution of the country by seasonable publications ; and principally in building farm-houses, blasting rocks, enclosing wastes, in making bad land good, in planting larches, and in planting in the hearts of my children principles of piety, of benevolence, and of self-government.

The sad part of all this was, that upon the whole, the lay mind acquiesced in this episcopal standard, and looked upon the bishops, not as rulers of the Church or shepherds of God's sheep, but as dignified writers or gentlemen of ease. Bishops like Hoadley or Watson

were continually being attacked fiercely for their political views or their lack of principle ; but it never seems to have occurred to the most earnest laymen to accuse them of deficiency in the pastoral spirit. The bishop quotes, with some gusto, a letter to himself from a prominent layman, in which the latter writes : “ You have nobly acquired a right to lay aside your pen, and amuse yourself in whatever field you choose, by the pre-eminence of your literary achievements, since your writings (pray observe that I am now imparting to you the expression of Lord Thurlow which I promised to communicate), since *your writings have done more for Christianity than all the bench of Bishops together.*”

The truth is that under the shameful patronage of the Hanoverian kings it had become acknowledged that a see, or a living, was the reward of some meritorious piece of work as politician or professor, or writer ; but such preferment did not, in the popular mind, pledge the receiver to any kind of evangelistic or ecclesiastical activity. The average layman, brought up under the low standard, forgave a priest almost anything, provided he were “ successful.” And men like Watson were undeniably that.

One of the few Church questions in which the bishop did interest himself was the improving of the value of poor livings. Poor livings, he urged in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, obliged needy ecclesiastics (like himself) to the evil practice of plurality.

I could produce many other proofs of the inadequacy of the maintenance provided for the parochial clergy, and show how much the ancient provision for them is now consumed in other ways, and as matters stand, not improperly consumed ; and I cannot help

thinking that the provision of two thousand a year, which I possess from the church, is a case full in point.

It arises from the tithes of two churches in Shropshire, of two in Leicestershire, of two in my diocese, of three in Huntingdonshire, on all of which I have resident curates; of five more as appropriations to the bishopric, and of two more in the Isle of Ely. I mention this not as a matter of complaint, but as a proof how little palliations will avail in amending the situation of the stipendiary curates.

Some years before, in a letter to Lord Chancellor Eldon, he had put up a defence for country clergy who preferred to live away from their parishes. His arguments are interesting, both as showing how pluralists soothed their consciences, and also as giving a glimpse into habits of the times.

There may be instances of country clergymen who occasionally live in towns; but these instances are, comparatively speaking, not numerous, nor are they in all cases to be blamed. A man of real talents, and good manners, may, by mingling with the higher classes of society in great towns, as essentially promote the belief and practice of Christianity, as if he were constantly conversant with a dozen peasants, his parishioners, in a country village. The want of medical assistance; the desire of giving a suitable education to his own children; the hope of bettering his situation, by educating the children of others; the being engaged in literary pursuits, where a variety of books is required; these, and such-like causes, are the main ones which induce some of the clergy to wish for a town residence; and if their place

is supplied in the country by a resident curate, I cannot think that much mischief will follow from such an indulgence being granted to a few, and it will never be desired by many of the body. Nay, if a young man should be accidentally inspired with an ambition to display his talents before a more respectable audience than his country parish affords him, his ambition should be rather encouraged than ridiculed and restrained; for a desire of acquiring professional fame is, next to poverty, the great source of professional excellence and industry.

Is it to be wondered at that Christianity was sore beset on all sides, and that the Church was considered to be tottering to its end, when a bishop could so write?

With all his lack of spirituality, Bishop Watson was a shrewd and capable man, and he knew many people of note in Church and State. His *Anecdotes*, therefore, makes interesting reading. He jibes at Archbishop Cornwallis (the fashionable prelate whom George III rebuked for holding Sunday "routs") as having no abilities and as being "so wife-ridden that I had no opinion of his politics." He inserts approving letters received in reply to his own books—as one from Gibbon. He discusses the politics of the day, and quotes at length his own speeches in the Lords. He discourses of the French Revolution, and writes a letter to the poet Cowper to cheer him in his melancholy, though the two had never met. He gives the Government officials, as we have seen, expert advice upon the making of gunpowder, or the amount of land required to grow timber for battleships.

Church readers, however, will be especially interested in passages in this autobiography which reflect the

attitude of mind possessed by the latitudinarian bishop and his circle of friends. He gives a very guarded approval of the founding of the National Society, being somewhat shy of its aims to promote the education of the poor in the principles of the Established Church; for he was afraid that this would arouse religious controversy and thought that "the Established Church was in no danger." Though a chartered Fellow of the S.P.G., as Regius Professor, he never subscribed to the Society, as he suspected it of seeking to convert Dissenters to Episcopacy more than heathen to Christianity! He wrote a lengthy letter, which is really a tract, upon repentance without once mentioning our blessed Lord in it; and in the above-mentioned letter to William Cowper urges as a cure for melancholy "the contemplation of the First Cause!"¹

But perhaps the climax of this watered-down Christianity is reached in an anecdote, in itself more human and simple than most of his writings, in which he describes his conduct at the deathbed of a friend who left him a fortune:—

When he was at the point of death, my heart was overpowered. I knelt down in a corner of his bed-chamber, and with as much humility and sincerity as I ever used in prayer for myself, I interceded with the Father of Mercies for pardon of my friend's transgressions. I knew perfectly well as the philo-

¹ The words are these: "Your mind, I see, from various parts of your work, is elevated to the contemplation of the First Cause, and filled with veneration for His inscrutable perfections; this is a disposition of all others most to be coveted; it generates no melancholy, it frees the soul from superstitious apprehensions, it warms the heart, it enlivens hope, it teaches resignation, it deadens our affections for this world, and it thereby fits us for another."

sophical object arguments which could be used against the efficacy of all human intercession ; and I was fully conscious of my own unworthiness and unfitness, with so many other sins of my own to answer for, to intercede for others ; but the most distant hope of being of use to my expiring friend overcame all my scruples. If we meet in another world, he will thank me for this instance of my love for him, when he was insensible to every earthly concern, and when I was wholly ignorant of the purport of his will.

In order to pray for the forgiveness of his dying friend, and to claim what was to him " the most distant hope " of answer to prayer, the worthy bishop had " scruples " to overcome ; and he could hope for thanks, *if* he met him in another world !

But in such questions as these the bishop, at normal times, seems to have been little interested. There was always one predominant interest in his mind—the hope of preferment. Throughout his book this runs like a thread binding all its leaves together. From the time that he accepted his Welsh see, he was aggrieved, and bitterly aggrieved, against ministers, chiefly Pitt, for not promoting him to a wealthier diocese. He " pulls strings," he hints, he definitely applies for a bishopric which may be worthier of his merits and his services to Church and State ! He even had hopes, and dropped hints in high places of his wish, to succeed Archbishop Moore at Lambeth in 1805. He feels it a personal indignity and insult to himself that he should be passed over, as sees fall vacant, for younger and less-known men. The modern reader shrinks from the lack of spirituality portrayed in this complacent self-seeking—

coupled, as it was, with such a gross neglect of present duty :—

I think I have been miserably neglected by Mr. Pitt, and I feel the indignity as I ought . . . To be overlooked by Mr. Pitt, or by any other minister, for want of character or ability in my profession, would cover me with shame ; it would be a silly affectation in me to say, that I feel any uneasiness on that account, when I compare myself with the rest of my brethren ; but to be overlooked for want of political pliancy is a circumstance I need not blush to own, and let the consequence be what it may, I shall never lament it.

The bishop, unmindful of the old saw, *Qui s'excuse, s'accuse*, is ever protesting his own political purity and uprightness as the reason for the neglect shown him :—

Reader ! when this meets your eye, the author of it will be rotting in the grave, insensible alike to censure or to praise ; but he begs to be forgiven this apparently self-condemnation ; it has not sprung from vanity, but from anxiety for his reputation, lest the disfavour of a Court should, by some, be considered as an indication of general disesteem, or a proof of professional dismerit.

In his later life Bishop Watson discovered that the reason for his non-preferment was that the old king, George III, was afraid of him as a Republican :—

I had long *suspected* that I was, from I know not what just cause, obnoxious to the Court ; but I did not, till after the Archbishopric of York had been given to the Bishop of Carlisle, *know* that I had been

proscribed many years before. By a letter from a noble friend, the Duke of Grafton, dated December 10th, 1807, I was informed that one of the most respectable earls in the kingdom, who had long known my manner of life, on a vacancy of the mastership of Trinity College, had gone of his own accord (and without his ever mentioning the circumstance to me) to Mr. Pitt, stating what just pretension I had to the offer of it ; that Mr. Pitt concurred with him, but said that *a certain person would not hear of it*. . . . Notwithstanding this anecdote, I cannot bring myself to believe that the King was either the first projector or the principal actor in the sorry farce of neglecting a man whom they could not dishonour, of distressing a man whom they could not dispirit, which has been playing at Court for near twenty-six years.

He gives one or two anecdotes of the king. The first is of an incident at a Royal levee in 1787.

I was standing next to a Venetian nobleman ; the King was conversing with him about the Republic of Venice, and hastily turning to me said, " There, now, you hear what he says of a republic." My answer was, " Sir, I look upon a republic to be one of the worst forms of government." The King gave me, as he thought, another blow about a republic. I answered, that I could not live under a republic. His Majesty still pursued the subject ; I thought myself insulted, and firmly I said, " Sir, I look upon the tyranny of any one man to be an intolerable evil, and upon the tyranny of an hundred to be an hundred times as bad." The King went off. His Majesty, I doubt not, had given credit to the

calumnies which the Court-insects had buzzed into his ears, of my being a favourite of republican principles, because I was known to be a supporter of revolution principles, and had a pleasure in letting me see what he thought of me.

At another levee, the bishop's benefit to the State in the gunpowder matter was mentioned to the King.

I happened to be standing next to the Duke of Richmond, then Master-General of the Ordnance, and the duke informed his Majesty, that they were indebted to me for a great improvement in its fabrication. On my saying that I ought to be ashamed of myself, inasmuch as it was a scandal in a Christian Bishop to instruct men in the mode of destroying mankind, the King answered, "Let not that afflict your conscience, for the quicker the conflict, the less the slaughter," or in words to that effect. I mention this to do justice to the King, whose understanding it was the fashion to decry. In all the conversations I had with him, he appeared to me not to be at all deficient in quickness or intelligence.

In reading of the King's answer, one cannot but wonder how many peaceable Christians, forced to take up arms against their fellowmen during recent years, have comforted themselves by the principle involved in it.

Another anecdote would suggest that the king did not like the use of the Athanasian Creed.

The clergyman there (i.e., at Windsor) on a day when the Athanasian Creed was to be read began with *Whosoever will be saved*, etc. ; the King, who

usually responded with a loud voice, was silent ; the minister repeated, in an higher tone, his *Whosoever* ; the King continued silent ; at length the Apostles' Creed was repeated by the minister, and the King followed him throughout with a distinct and audible voice.

But authorities tell us that Dr. Heberden's account (it was this divine who told the story to the bishop) made it clear that the King did not refuse to respond from dislike of the Athanasian Creed, but because he could not find his place in the Prayer Book !

Once—and only once, so far as I can find—is a confirmation mentioned in the *Anecdotes*. Here is the bishop's description of it :—

In the extensive visitation of my diocese, which I made this year (1809), I went over the mountains from Neath to a place where no bishop had ever held a confirmation before, Merthyr Tidvil. In my time this place had become, from a small village, a great town, containing ten or twelve thousand inhabitants, occupied in the fabrication of iron ; and I thought it my duty not only to go to confirm the young people there, but to preach to those who were grown up, that I might if possible, leave among the inhabitants a good impression in favour of the teachers in the Established Church, when compared with those of many of the sectarian congregations into which the people were divided.

But, alas, the flavour of even this piece of honest work is spoiled by the latter half of the anecdote, which tells how the popular ironmaster who entertained the bishop

expressed his astonishment at the manner in which I had been neglected by the Court ; and making no apology for his frankness, told me, with evident concern, that he was sure I should never be translated. With equal frankness I assured him, that I would never ask for a translation, desiring, at the same time to know the ground of his opinion ; he said that he had been informed by the best authority (which he mentioned), that I was considered by Court as a man of far too independent a spirit, and had long been put down in the Queen's Black Book.

And there, with his own self-satisfaction, and dissatisfaction with others, we may leave the bishop. It is all a very sordid story, though we should be wrong to judge the worthy man by our higher standard of to-day.

But what a story it is, none the less, of gross and palpable neglect of Christ's starving flock ! "The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed." Can we wonder that so many Welshmen, even after the lapse of a century, have no special love for the Church of their forefathers ?

And, as we think with shame upon this appalling story of spiritual sloth typical of other episcopal careers of the age, demanding our *Repentance* for the past, and let our eyes rest for a moment upon the prayerful activities of the present, and as we realise that God, so far from extinguishing the Church's candle, has graciously permitted it to be, in some measure, rekindled, may not we Churchmen—in spite of faults and difficulties of to-day—press on towards the future with renewed and undying *Hope* ?

HANNAH MORE

I

Her early life and quickly earned success as a playwright and poet—Friendship with Garrick, Johnson, Horace Walpole and "Blue-stocking" ladies—Retirement to Cowslip Green, and growing seriousness of purpose—Helped by Wilberforce in efforts for education of poor—Her later writings—Her part in English literature and life.

IF it be true that the name of Samuel Johnson is held in honour amongst us, whilst we are ignorant of his achievements, much more is this true of Hannah More. How many Englishmen—even Churchmen—of to-day could say what was her work for England and the English people, or for what her name stood in her own generation? If asked, "Who was Hannah More?" would not the average Englishman either confess total ignorance of her, or venture vaguely upon such an answer as "Didn't she write tracts?"

Fame, in handing down to posterity this suggestion of an elderly strait-laced spinster who wrote tracts, has not done justice to the memory of one who not only was a popular dramatist, a brilliant woman of letters, and the friend of such men as Dr. Johnson, Edmund Burke, Horace Walpole and David Garrick, but also did more than anyone else in her lifetime to bring before the notice of the careless rich the sufferings and ignorance of the English poor.

Hannah More was born in 1745, at Stapleton, in Gloucestershire, her father being headmaster of the

local grammar school. We may gain a due perspective of the times by recalling that 1745 was the year of Fontenoy, that John Wesley was forty-two years of age, whilst Johnson, then thirty-six years old, was scheming his great dictionary.

From her earliest years Hannah was precocious in studies, learning before four years old to read by listening to her elder sisters' lessons, and at eight years of age startling her father by her rapid progress in Latin. At a very early age she began to scribble verses and essays, and when she went, as a girl of eleven, to the school opened by her sisters at Bristol, her genius obtained an excellent grounding in English literature, French and Italian. At the very early age of sixteen she wrote *The Search after Happiness*, a pastoral play for acting in girls' schools. By the time she was twenty she had translated Metastasio's *Regulus*—a work which she afterwards produced as a play, *The Inflexible Captive*. *The Search after Happiness* won for her no small reputation as an authoress in her own neighbourhood and in school circles, and this was enhanced when in 1773, *The Inflexible Captive* was produced at Bath, then the centre of fashion. At the end of that year she was welcomed with open arms by the most select literary circles in London.

An event, tragic enough at the time, now enabled her to give her whole time to literary work instead of teaching, like her sisters, for a livelihood. A wealthy middle-aged man, named Turner, uncle of two of her schoolfellows, who had fallen in love with the clever, vivacious girl when she was staying with her friends at his house, and had been accepted by her, deferred marriage from time to time until Hannah's pride revolted and broke off the engagement. The worthy

man made some amends by settling £200 a year upon her, with the express purpose of freeing her for literary work ; and this, after a good deal of persuasion, Hannah accepted. But she resolved, and kept her resolution, never again to think of marriage.

Her way now lay open to enter upon a life of literary effort, and to that all her natural bent and genius pointed. To few literary aspirants has such instant and signal success been granted. Not only were her first efforts successful in themselves, but she was fortunate in making friendships which were to bring out all her innate genius. On her first entry into London society she was introduced to David Garrick, who was then sixty years old, and was just retiring from the stage. Garrick was, perhaps, the most popular man of his time with the noble and rich and learned, and his houses in the Adelphi Terrace and at Hampton were the rendezvous of almost every kind of wit and talent. With him and his wife Hannah struck up a lasting friendship. In their house she met such great men as Johnson and Burke and Reynolds, and those talented ladies, like Mrs. Montagu, who formed the famous "Blue-stocking" circle. Here she was to write some of her most successful books, and her first visit was the forerunner of many, lasting over thirty years. The Garricks allowed her a room in which she could study and write undisturbed, and with them, when in London, she always made her home.

It was not the fashionable side of London society which made the country girl's London visits a great delight and enjoyment to her. Sightseeing had no special attraction for her, and all her life she detested the crush of a drawing-room crowded with people who came to show off their clothes or play cards or

talk scandal. "I should make a miserably bad fine lady," she once wrote. "What most people come to London *for*, would keep me *from* it." Pleasure parties were a weariness to her; what she delighted in, as a means of learning and of developing one's personality, was *conversation*. She herself was a brilliant conversationalist, vivacious and witty, and in intellectual intercourse with men like Johnson (who himself, once his reputation was established, did little writing, and lived for conversation) she took immense pleasure. The great "Blue-stockings" hostesses laid themselves out to provide intellectual and entertaining conversation for their guests, and indeed sometimes provided no other entertainment than the mutual conversation of the politicians, scholars, authors, bishops and wits who gathered at their parties.

The eighteenth century was a great letter-writing age, and in her letters to her sisters the young authoress gave vivacious and natural accounts of her London life. Of a party at Garrick's Adelphi house she once wrote:—

The *dramatis personæ* were Mrs. Boscowen, Mrs. Garrick, and Miss Reynolds; my *beaux* were Dr. Johnson, Dean Tucker, and last, but not least in our love, David Garrick. You know that wherever Johnson is, the confinement to the tea-table is rather a durable situation, and it was an hour and a half before I got my enlargement. However, my ears were opened, though my tongue was locked, and they all stayed till near eleven. Garrick was the very soul of the company, and I never saw Johnson in such perfect good humour. Sally knows that we can never properly enjoy the company of these two unless they are together. There is great truth in

this remark, for after the Dean and Mrs. Boscawen were withdrawn, and the rest stood up to go, Johnson and Garrick began a close encounter, telling old stories "e'en from their boyish days," at Lichfield. We all stood round the table above an hour, laughing in defiance of every rule of decorum and Chesterfield.

In another letter she tells an amusing story of Sir Joshua Reynolds and his picture of the child Samuel :—

Sir Joshua tells me that he is exceedingly mortified when he shows this picture to some of the great—they ask who Samuel was ! I told him he must get somebody to make an *Oratorio* of Samuel, and then it would not be vulgar to confess they knew something of him.

In 1775 she wrote a poem, *Sir Eldred of the Bower*, for which Cadell the publisher offered her, quaintly enough, the same amount, if she could discover what it was, which Goldsmith had received for the *Deserted Village*. Hannah tells a pretty story of Garrick reading *Sir Eldred* aloud :—

After dinner Garrick took up *The Monthly Review* and read *Sir Eldred* with all his pathos and all his graces. I think I never was so ashamed in my life ; but he read it so superlatively that I cried like a child. Only think what a scandalous thing, to cry at the reading of one's own poetry ! I could have beaten myself ; for it looked as if I thought it very moving, which I can truly say was far from being the case. But the beauty of the jest lies in this : Mrs. Garrick twinkled as well as I, and made as many apologies for crying at her husband's reading

as I did for crying at my own verses. She got out of the scrape by pretending she was touched at the story, and I by saying the same thing of the reading. It furnished us with a great laugh.

Two years later her play, *Percy*, written under Garrick's supervision, was produced in London, and had an enormous popularity, all the fashionable world flocking to see it. The first impression of the book, consisting of 4000 copies, was exhausted in less than a fortnight! This success was the more striking because Sheridan was just then at the height of his popularity, and the *School for Scandal* was being acted at this time at the other London theatre (it seems almost inconceivable nowadays that at the end of the eighteenth century London had but two theatres!)

Percy was followed by another play, *The Fatal Falsehood*, two years later, and in 1782 by a book of poetry, *Sacred Dramas*. The latter work consisted of four Scriptural stories, the Finding of Moses, the Slaying of Goliath, Belshazzar's Feast, and the Monologue of Hezekiah. In a blank verse introduction the authoress asked why readers should delight in such classical stories of Deucalion's Deluge, or the labours of Hercules, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, or the friendship of Nisus and Euryalus, and neglect the Biblical stories of Noah, Samson, Jephthah's daughter, and David and Jonathan. The *Dramas* had a great vogue, and more than thirty years later we find Sir A. Johnstone, the Chief Justice of Ceylon, having the book translated into Cingalese, to be performed by Cingalese children at an annual festival.

Garrick died in 1779, and for many years Hannah spent her winters with his widow, finding plenty of

opportunity in Mrs. Garrick's now quiet house for assiduous writing and reading. She was an omnivorous reader. According to her own account, she and Mrs. Garrick at this time "dressed like a couple of aldermen, walked like a couple of porters, and read as much as any two doctors of either university." Such books as Swift's *Letters*, Beattie's *Metaphysics*, Hoole's *Ariosto*, Locke and de St. Simon are continually mentioned in her correspondence. In a letter written in later years she describes how on one visit to Hampton she read straight through the volumes which she found upon one short bookshelf in her room. Amongst them were *Devotions of St. Francis de Sales*, *Life of Spinoza*, *Sentiments de Piété*, *Cartouche the Highwayman*, *Fénélon*, *Queen Christina*, Sir Thomas Browne's *Miscellanies*, Mr. Tom Brown's *Letters*, *Life of St. Paul*, *Spanish Novels*, and Bussy Rabutin's *Use of Adversity*. In 1784 her erudition and genius were recognised by election to the French Academy.

II

Such intellectual giants as Dr. Johnson and Edmund Burke not only delighted in her company, but thought most highly of her literary power. At a dinner once, when sitting at her side, Johnson checked a guest who began to speak of poetry. "Hush, hush," he said, "it is dangerous to say a word of poetry before her; it is talking of the art of war before Hannibal." Though posterity has not endorsed this extravagant view of Hannah More's literary merits, the famous doctor's opinion was warmly endorsed by the contemporary literary world. It is possible that the lady's brilliant personality had something to do with it.

Among several interesting anecdotes which link her memory with Dr. Johnson is a characteristic story of how once he rebuked her, as a Protestant, for reading Catholic books. She was beginning to defend herself when he took her with both hands, and with tears in his eyes said earnestly, "Child, I am heartily glad that you read pious books, by whomsoever they may be written." It was to Hannah that he made one of his frequent confessions as to weaknesses of the flesh. She urged him once to take a little wine. "I can't drink a little, child," his answer was, "therefore I never drink it; abstinence is as easy to me as temperance would be difficult." On another occasion he took great delight in conducting her round his old college at Oxford. In the common room they found a large print of the doctor framed, with a line from one of her poems attached, "And is not Johnson ours, himself a host?"

Edmund Burke, as we have seen, was another of her friends, and with Horace Walpole she maintained a correspondence for twenty years, much to the scandal of some of her straight-laced critics, who felt that with such a libertine no Christian woman should have any sort of dealing.

It may well be imagined with what rejoicing Evangelicalism, in its fight against the materialism of the age, saw so popular and gifted a personality enter its ranks. Not that the conversion was a sudden one. Hannah More, who had a Presbyterian strain in her blood, was always religious-minded, and, amidst her most fashionable friends, sturdily refused to play cards—though this may have been due in the first place, to a personal dislike for card-playing; and she consistently kept her Sundays free from any kind of pleasure-making.

Sunday, kept as a day of religious exercises and reading, brought her far greater pleasure than if it had been passed in the " routs " and music parties then fashionable on that day. She tells us in a letter that she went twice to churches where she heard good preaching, especially to St. Clement's, and how it was a joy to her to remember that she received Holy Communion there with Johnson the last time he communicated in public.

Little by little this side of her character outbade any desire she may have had for literary fame or social enjoyment or distinction. While her plays were still at the height of their popularity she gave up attending theatres, and did not even see Mrs. Siddons act Edwina in *Percy*, when all the fashionable world flocked to the theatre for that purpose.

At this time she was forty-two years old. Two years before she had retired to a rustic spot, Cowslip Green, ten miles from Bristol. Her increasing distaste for fashionable society, however, and her growing desire to give her talents to useful work, did not lead her to break with all her friends of rank or letters. It formed part of her great opportunity for Christian usefulness that she should be on friendly terms with many who would hardly pay heed to truth except from such lips as hers, which they had learnt to respect for wit and humour. John Newton, who became Hannah's spiritual director, saw this plainly, and told her so. In 1787 she published *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*, and three years later her *Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World*. Both books dealt severely with fashionable irreligion, and achieved a wide circulation. Men like Walpole not only read and admired her books, but listened respectfully and

courteously when she upbraided them for abuse of time or misuse of Sundays. In influencing such men she was doubtless helped much by her possession of a broadmindedness not always found in one so pious or strict as she was. She was able to contract lasting friendships, not only with men of the world like Walpole, but with the Roman Catholic Mrs. Garrick, and the Unitarian Mrs. Barbauld, and she and her sisters, in spite of their staunch Protestantism, received into their family circle, at the time of the French Revolution, numbers of the French emigrant priests.

No doubt, too, her acute sense of humour, whilst it made her popular, also kept her free from the narrower religious prejudices. Of wit she certainly had plenty. Writing to her sisters once from the whirl of London society, she describes how it was the fashion not to wear jewellery or expensive dresses until after Christmas. "But," she says, "one may lose a good deal of money in a very bad gown." Writing elsewhere of good wives, she says, "There are certain ladies, who, merely from being faithful or frugal, are reckoned excellent wives, and who, indeed, make a man everything but happy. . . . Lest their account of merit should run too high, they allow themselves to be unpleasant in proportion as they are useful; not considering that it is almost the worst kind of domestic immorality to be disagreeable." An amusing letter is extant (it reminds one of Cowper's famous nonsensical rhyming letter) forwarded by her with a pair of socks which she had knitted for a friend's child. Consisting of several pages, in the grand style, it succeeds in describing the gift in such a way that a reader once thought it referred to a poem, and hunted

through the authoress's works to find it ! The letter begins :—

DEAR MADAM,

I leave you to dedicate the enclosed work, the fruit of a few day's leisure at St. Albans, to either of your little children, of whose capacity of receiving it you will be best judge upon trial, for there is a certain fitness without which the best works are of little value.

In a short poem, *Bishop Bonner's Ghost*, written whilst staying at Fulham Palace, she pictures, with no small humour, the horror of Bonner at returning to his old haunts, and finding an episcopal wife in possession !

Whether in the country or London, Hannah became more and more immersed in good works and identified with the efforts of the Evangelical leaders of the time. Very interested, for instance, in Wilberforce's anti-slavery efforts, she wrote a poem, *The Slave Trade*, which ran through three editions in a few days.

III

Her friendship with him led to a new venture in her life. In 1789, Wilberforce, then a man of thirty-one, came to visit the More sisters at Cowslip Green. He went for a walk, and upon his return he seemed pre-occupied and serious, and would speak only about the poverty and misery of the natives of the district, and at supper that night, as soon as the maid had left the room, he said, " Miss Hannah More, something must be done for Cheddar."

And indeed Cheddar did need all the spiritual help

that anyone could give it. The vicar was non-resident, and his curate lived nine miles away at Wells, visiting the parish on Sundays only. Indeed, no priest had resided in the parish for forty years ! The ignorance, vice and misery of the inhabitants were past belief. Without resident clergy or schools or any kind of church worker, their daily life had no uplifting influence; so degraded were they that it was hardly safe for travellers to visit the Cheddar caves. The Sunday services had little value, for eight worshippers in the morning and twenty in the afternoon were an average congregation.

The spiritual destitution of Cheddar was shared by the entire district. Not only Cheddar, but thirteen adjoining parishes were without a resident curate, and apparently there had been little religion in them since the Reformation.

Hannah More responded to Mr. Wilberforce's appeal. Henry Thornton and Wilberforce undertook to finance her efforts, and before long her four sisters, who had given up their school, were prepared to work with her. A school of industry and a Sunday-school were started in Cheddar, and nine other neglected parishes were undertaken as their sphere of work. In these schools in a short time she and her workers had five hundred children under instruction, and in a few years the results were seen in a marked diminution of crime in the whole district. But the difficulties were immense. The villages were scattered and distant ; one was even fifteen miles from Cowslip Green. So ignorant were the villagers that they imagined at first that the sisters, in urging them to send their children to their schools, were acting as agents for slave-dealers, and the well-to-do inhabitants of the district mostly refused

to help, saying that the poor were bound to be depraved and vicious, and that no efforts could make any difference to them.

However, a steady and patient perseverance gradually overcame difficulties and broke down opposition. At their girls' school at Cheddar and elsewhere, sewing, reading, knitting and spinning were taught. Prayer Books and Bibles were distributed to the children who were thought likely to use them. Thrift clubs were established for men and women. Every girl brought up in one of the schools who continued to attend after growing up, and married with a good character, was presented on her wedding day with five shillings, a new Bible, and a pair of white stockings. After the schools had existed for a year a sermon was read after school on Sunday evenings, and parents were invited to attend, and this, with reading of prayers, was much appreciated. Once a year the sisters entertained a huge gathering of the school-children from the different villages to dinner, the neighbouring clergy attending this annual gathering, and crowds of sight-seers coming out of curiosity.

But the devil could not see all this good work done without stirring up trouble. Gradually violent opposition arose—some of it from the local clergy. For three years the More sisters had to endure the vilest slanders. They were accused of fanaticism, of Methodism, of encouraging vice, of sympathising with French hostility to England; no mud was too filthy to fling at them. How bitter the persecution was is shown by Hannah's assertion later that twenty-three books had been written against her, and that four of her assailants had been tried for libel and found guilty.

All this trouble ended in a very serious illness, and

in 1802 the Misses More moved from Cowslip Green to a new home, which they called Barley Wood.

IV

Hannah's work in the country had enlisted her sympathies whole-heartedly with the working-classes, and in 1792 she had published a tract called *Village Politics*, "By Will Chip, a Country Carpenter." This leaflet, addressed to the artisans and labourers of England, was intended to controvert the French revolutionary ideas which, thanks to their assiduous propagation in cottage, workshop and mine by Tom Paine and his followers, were then fast spreading among English working-men. In dialogue form, the tract is lively and humorous, as its opening shows :—

Jack : "What's the matter, Tom? Why dost look so dismal?"

Tom : "Dismal, indeed! Well enough I may."

Jack : "What! is the old mare dead, or work scarce?"

Tom : "No, no; work's plenty enough, if a man had but the heart to go to it."

Jack : "What book art reading? Why dost look so like a hang-dog?"

Tom (looking on his book) : "Cause enough. Why, I find here that I'm very unhappy, and very miserable, which I should never have known if I had not had the good luck to meet with this book. Oh, 'tis a precious book!"

Jack : "A good sign, though, that you can't find out you're unhappy without looking into a book for it! What's the matter?"

Tom : "Matter? Why, I want liberty."

The leaflet, though published anonymously, was famous almost at once, selling all over the country in hundreds of thousands.

It was soon followed by *Cheap Repository Tracts*, in the production of which Hannah was helped by her literary friends. These were monthly packets of instructive stories, ballads, cooking recipes, etc., sold at less than cost price—a proceeding made possible by the generosity of many of the authoress's rich friends. Dr. Porteus, Bishop of London, wrote to her that he knew of the success of the *Tracts* in every quarter of the globe. He himself had sent "shiploads" to the West Indies. They were greedily read at such places as Sierra Leone, and in Sweden, France and Russia. Nobody can gauge what all this talented but humble spade-work meant for the uplifting and enlightenment of the ignorant and degraded at a time when few cared about their misery and wretchedness, and none troubled to wield the pen for them.

A new book in 1799, *Strictures of Female Education*, led to another, more ambitious, *Hints towards forming the Character of a Princess*, undertaken at the request of some in high quarters. The princess in question was Princess Charlotte, who was then (in 1805) just eight years old, and was expected to succeed to the English throne, but died, to the great sorrow of the nation, whilst still young. The book was considered Miss More's prose masterpiece, and is filled, not only with commonsense, but with stores of erudition and wide reading.

The authoress had no little share in the education of a very different personality. At her house Zachary Macaulay had met, and fallen in love with, the lady who became his wife, and their eldest boy, "Tommy,"

the future Lord Macaulay, often spent his holidays at Barley Wood. Miss Meakin¹ tells us :—

Hannah often kept the little boy with her for weeks, listening to him as he read prose by the ell and declaimed the poetry he so quickly committed to memory. . . . She would discuss and compare with him his favourite heroes, ancient and modern and fictitious, under all points of view and under every condition, and coax him from his books to run round the grounds, or play at cooking in the kitchen ; giving him Bible lessons which invariably ended in a theological argument, and following him with advice and sympathy through his many literary enterprises.

All this must have profoundly influenced a very impressionable boy ; and the historian himself acknowledged in later years that his lady friend had first called out his literary tastes, whilst her gifts of books laid the foundation of his library.

During her philanthropic labours Hannah was more and more withdrawing from the circle of her fashionable friends, and confining her society to such as were inspired by her own serious ideals. Death, too, was laying his hand upon her friends of earlier days. In 1797, Horace Walpole (now Lord Orford) died. At his death she wrote :—

I am not sorry now that I never flinched from any of his ridicule or attacks, or suffered them to pass without rebuke. At our last meeting I made him promise to read Law's *Serious Call*. His playful

¹ In her book, *Hannah More*, from which much of the information in this chapter has been culled.

wit, his various knowledge, his polished manners, alas! what avail they now! The most serious thoughts are awakened. Oh, that he had known and believed the things that belongs to his peace!

In the same year Edmund Burke died.

From her gradual retirement the public gained what her friends lost. A series of books came from the authoress's pen. In 1809 (she was now sixty-four years old) *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* ran through twelve editions in eleven months, and in America reached thirty editions in her lifetime. *Coelebs* was a "study in religious eugenics," describing the search of a young man for an ideal wife, and his experiences in the different circles which he visited for that end. One quotation of some length will serve to show its admirable humour and skilful character-painting:—

In the evening Mrs. Ranby was lamenting, in general and rather customary terms, her own exceeding sinfulness.

"You accuse yourself rather too heavily, my dear," said Mr. Ranby. "You have sins, to be sure——"

"And pray, what sins have I, Mr. Ranby?" said she, turning to him with so much quickness that the poor man started.

"Nay," said he meekly, "I did not mean to offend you; so far from it that, hearing you condemn yourself so grievously, I intended to comfort you, and to say that, except a few faults——"

"And pray, what faults?" interrupted she, continuing to speak, however, lest he should catch an interval in which to tell them. "I defy you, Mr. Ranby, to produce one."

"My dear," replied he, "as you charged yourself with all, I thought it would be letting you off cheaply by naming only two or three, such as——"

Here Coelebs, fearing matters might go too far between this amiable couple, tried to soften matters a little for the lady, saying that he thought Ranby meant that she partook of the general corruption.

His speech was interrupted here by Mr. Ranby, who exclaimed that he did not mean to infer that his wife was worse than other women.

"Worse, Mr. Ranby! Worse?" cried she, and then Ranby, for the first time in his life, not minding her, went on:

"As she is always insisting that the whole species is corrupt, she cannot help allowing that she herself has not quite escaped the infection. Now to be a sinner in the gross and a saint in the detail, that is, to have sins and no faults, is a thing I do not quite comprehend." And he left the room, whereupon Mrs. Ranby apologised for him as a well-meaning man, who acted up to the little light he had, but was unacquainted with religious feeling, and knew little of the nature of conversion.

In the next few years, from 1811 to 1824, Miss More published *Practical Piety*, *Christian Morals* (both sold out before they left the press), *Essay on the Writings of St. Paul*, *Moral Sketches*, and lastly (when she was seventy-nine) *The Spirit of Prayer*, 6000 copies of which sold in a year.

The authoress lived until 1833, but her health was very feeble for some years before her death. To the end, however, she took interest in philanthropic schemes, such as the efforts of the Bible Society.

Her last word was "Joy," and no small witness to the part which she had played in increasing the happiness of others was borne by the enormous procession, including many parish priests and schoolchildren, which followed her coffin to its last resting-place.

When we review the considerable writings which Hannah More left, it must be confessed that—though they are still worth some study—they do not contain much which is likely to find a permanent place in English literature. Yet, in her own days, they enjoyed an enormous popularity; and though this popularity was doubtless partly due to the great lack, in those days, of simple, persuasive writings upon practical religion (there were countless writers upon the theoretical side of religion), her books must have exercised an immense influence in uplifting the trend of popular literature and taste. She was able to say, a few years before her death, that she had lived to see a real increase of genuine religion among the higher classes of society. That increase was, in no small measure, due to her own brilliant gifts and personal influence; whilst her efforts for the physical and spiritual welfare of the working-classes were still more abundantly blessed. If she does not take that high place in English literature which Dr. Johnson and other contemporaries prophesied for her, she takes a very high place amongst those English leaders who have laboured for the advancement of God's kingdom. And she will ever remain one of the most striking instances of how love of our Lord can in every age lead the highly talented to turn their backs upon applause and success in order to follow resolutely, in the face of opposition and opprobrium, the paths of humble and self-denying service.

GEORGE CRABBE

I

Apprentice to a surgeon ; tax-collector ; apothecary ; writer and priest
—Domestic chaplain—Pluralist and absentee from his parishes—
His poems—Crabbe's Churchmanship, judged from his writings
—His sympathy with, and close knowledge of, the poor—His
Tales.

GEORGE CRABBE was a typical eighteenth century parson and a typical eighteenth century poet. As a parson, he was typical of the priesthood of his time in his decent morality, his thorough lack of enthusiasm, his shameless pluralism and absenteeism ; and also in the way in which his flock, hitherto somewhat hostile, accepted him when he became a " successful man." On the literary side, his style, with its couplets and its neat antitheses, was also characteristic of the age, though he had his original contribution to add to contemporary literature. In this brief account of him, it will be convenient to deal first with his life, and then with his writings.

Crabbe was born at Aldeburgh, in Suffolk, in 1754, the eldest son of a collector of salt duties ; and his first twenty-five years were spent here and in the surrounding district. From early days he showed a taste for poetry, and accordingly was given a somewhat better education than other lads of his class, including some knowledge of the Latin classics. He was still under fourteen, however, when he was apprenticed in 1768 to a surgeon living near Bury St. Edmunds, who combined medicine with farming. Three years later

the lad was transferred to the service of another doctor at Woodbridge, with whom he stayed four years.

His heart was less in his profession than in verse making, at which he was always trying his hand. In 1775 he published, through an Ipswich bookseller, a long poem in the usual Popian couplets, called *Inebriety*. This professed to describe the different phases of intemperance in the different classes of life—villager, farmer, squire, parson, etc. Though it spoke of some promise in its youthful writer, the booklet seems to have made no stir in the literary world.

In 1775 he left Woodbridge to help his father, who had fallen on evil days, in his work on Slaughden Quay. A little later he set up in business at Woodbridge as an apothecary, but met with the slenderest success. During all these years he was studying botany diligently, with a very observant eye for the scenery and natural history of his native district. Throughout his poetry, all his life, he reproduced, often in passages of no little skill and beauty, these early scenes of his boyhood and youth.

In 1780, wearied at last of failure at home, he borrowed £5 from a neighbouring gentleman, paid his debts, and with the three remaining pounds, a box of clothes, and a few surgical instruments, set out to try his fortune in London.

Here the money, and the instruments too, had vanished before he was fortunate enough to find a patron in Edmund Burke, the great orator and politician. With his assistance the *Library* was published, and help from Lord Chancellor Thurlow was forthcoming. A little later, in 1781, he was ordained by the Bishop of Norwich to serve a curacy in his native town. But the ex-apothecary did not get on very well

with his fellow-townsmen, and was relieved to accept a post offered him through Burke's influence a few months later, as private chaplain to the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle.

The somewhat rustic chaplain, however, could hardly enjoy the social amenities which this new work involved ; and, indeed, the post of domestic chaplain was, at this time, often regarded as little higher than that of domestic servant. Both Crabbe's diary and verse express the sensitive awkwardness which now made his lot a difficult one.

Arriving at the Hall, he tried
For air composed, serene, and satisfied ;
As he had practised in his room alone,
And there acquired a free and easy tone :
There he had said, " Whatever the degree
A man obtains, what more than man is he ? "
And when arriv'd—" This room is but a room ;
Can aught we see the steady soul o'ercome ?
Let me in all a manly firmness show,
Upheld by talents, and their value know."

This reason urged ; but it surpassed his skill
To be in act as manly as in will :
When he his lordship and the lady saw,
Brave as he was, he felt oppressed with awe ;
And spite of verse, that so much praise had won,
The poet found he was the bailiff's son.

The *Village* was published in 1783, and at once won attention by its vivid realism. A short while before Gray's *Elegy* and Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* had painted village life in idealistic colours. Crabbe, with unerring instinct, painted the sterner and sadder side of country life, and held his readers spell-bound with the horror of humble tragedies.

In 1783 the Lord Chancellor presented him two small Dorsetshire livings, Frome St. Quentin and

Evershot. This—according to the regular custom of the time—did not interfere with his residence at Belvoir. Absentee incumbents put poorly paid curates into their vicarages, and did their parochial duties by deputy ; and so did Crabbe.

In the following year the Duke of Rutland became Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, and did not take Crabbe with him. Relying, however, upon his patron's promise of support, Crabbe married Miss Elmy, a Suffolk lady, with whom he had been in love since he lived at Woodbridge, twelve years before. In the following year the young couple moved to Stathern, in Leicestershire, the curacy of which place Crabbe held for four years. Here several children were born to them.

In 1789 he exchanged his two Dorsetshire livings for those of Muston in Leicestershire and Allington in Lincolnshire—parishes which, though in different counties, were little more than a mile apart ; and he took up his abode at Muston. Though he was to hold these livings for twenty-five years, he left Muston in charge of a curate after three years' residence to enter upon family property in his old county of Suffolk, where he undertook charge of two villages, Sweffling and Great Glenham.

All this time Crabbe was steadily writing, though he published nothing between 1785 and 1807.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century public and episcopal feeling was being roused against the scandal of clerical non-residence ; and in 1801 the Bishop of Lincoln ordered Crabbe to return to Muston to tend his unvisited sheep. By some means or other Crabbe obtained permission to stay four more years in Suffolk ; but at the end of that time reluctantly returned, in October, 1805, to Muston Parsonage.

From here, in 1807, the poet published the *Parish Register*, a work which gained him instant fame. In this volume Crabbe pictures a parish priest glancing through the parish registers of births, marriages and funerals for the past year, and telling the life story of each entry. This was followed three years later by the *Borough*, the characters in which were drawn from his old fellow-townsmen at Aldeburgh. In both these volumes the scenes are extraordinarily vivid and life-like, though the stories almost always dwell on the seamy side of life. Two years later came the *Tales*, which dealt with middle class as well as lowlier characters.

Crabbe had his own share of the dark side of life. Of his seven children five died young; and for years before his wife's death in 1813, she suffered from mental trouble.

No doubt this great domestic sorrow (Crabbe had proved a devoted husband whilst it lasted) had helped to make Muston more tedious than ever to the poet. He had never been happy there, and soon after Mrs. Crabbe's death, he gladly accepted the living of Trowbridge, in Somersetshire. Here, with its nearness to Bath and to Bath society, the old man, now a famous poet, found life more congenial. During his thirteen remaining years he paid periodical visits to London to mix in literary society, and one visit to Edinburgh to Sir Walter Scott, with whom he had struck up a warm friendship.

In 1832 he fell ill, shortly after officiating in church in the parish of one of his sons, and died after a few days' illness. In 1819 *Tales of the Hall* had been published, and after his death his son produced *Posthumous Tales*.

II

As regards Crabbe's churchmanship, there has been considerable controversy. To some he seems the denial of all churchmanship worth speaking about. They can see in him only the absentee literary parson whose thoughts, to the neglect of his flock, were centred on verse making and the patronage of the great. A case could doubtless be made out for this view. Crabbe thought nothing, as we have seen, of leaving his parishes for years in the charge of curates. He certainly spent a large part of his time in writing and in social visiting ; and he was not altogether a successful parish priest.

But, when all this has been acknowledged, there seems no reason to doubt that Crabbe was quite up to the eighteenth century standard in the matter of parochial work. If he was many years non-resident from his livings, this was but what other conscientious parsons did ; and wherever he went, he seems to have sought parochial work of some kind or other.

His writings show again and again that he had a real sense of parochial responsibility. Take, for instance, his description of a sick pauper neglected by his sporting rector :—

Fain would he ask the parish-priest to prove
His title certain to the joys above :
For this he sends the murmuring nurse, who calls
The holy stranger to these dismal walls :
And doth not he, the pious man, appear,
He, " passing rich on forty pounds a year " ?
Ah ! no ; a shepherd of a different stock,
And far unlike him, feeds this little flock :
A jovial youth, who thinks his Sunday's task
As much as God or man can fairly ask ;

The rest he gives to loves and labours light,
To fields the morning, and to feasts the night ;
None better skilled the noisy pack to guide,
To urge their chase, to cheer them or to chide ;
A sportsman keen, he shoots through half the day,
And, skill'd at whist, devotes the night to play :
Then, while such honours bloom around his head,
Shall he sit sadly by the sick man's bed,
To raise the hopes he feels not, or with zeal
To combat fears that e'en the pious feel ?

Crabbe was a stout " Church of England man," after the eighteenth century manner, terribly afraid of Dissent, and scornful of anything like emotional religion. Here is his description of a " Methodist " rector :—

To a new style his reverence rashly took ;
Loud grew his voice, to threat'ning swell'd his look ;
Above, below, on either side, he gazed,
Amazing all, and most himself amazed :
No more he read his preachments pure and plain,
But launch'd outright, and rose and sank again :
At times he smiled in scorn, at times he wept,
And such sad coil with words of vengeance kept,
That our best sleepers started as they slept.
" Conviction comes like lightning," he would cry ;
" In vain you seek it, and in vain you fly ;
'Tis like the rushing of the mighty wind,
Unseen its progress, but its power you find ;
It strikes the child ere yet its reason wakes ;
His reason fled, the ancient sire it shakes ;
The proud, learn'd man, and him who loves to know
How and from whence these gusts of grace will blow,
It shuns,—but sinners in their way impedes,
And sots and harlots visit in their deeds :
Of faith and penance it supplies the place ;
Assures the vilest that they live by grace,
And, without running, makes them win the race."

So much did Crabbe fear the charge of Methodist " enthusiasm " that he felt obliged to add an apologetic

footnote after writing such touching lines as these to describe the peace which came to a disordered brain :—

Pilgrim, burthen'd with thy sin,
Come the way to Zion's gate,
There, till Mercy let thee in,
Knock, and weep, and watch, and wait.
Knock !—He knows the sinner's cry :
Weep !—He loves the mourner's tears :
Watch !—for saving grace is nigh :
Wait !—till heavenly light appears.

Hark ! it is the Bridegroom's voice ;
Welcome, pilgrim, to thy rest ;
Now within the gate rejoice,
Safe and seal'd and bought and bless'd !
Safe—from all the lures of vice,
Seal'd—by signs the chosen know,
Bought—by love and life the price,
Bless'd—the mighty debt to owe.

These lines alone, apart from many other indications, would be sufficient to show that the poet had a strong religious sense, though it may not have been of a very robust kind, or of a kind to commend itself much to parishioners. He himself confessed that he preferred the society of women to that of men ; his sermons were dry and tedious ; and he was not always tactful. His son tells us, for instance, that when Crabbe returned to Muston after his many years' absence, he found that Dissent had gained a footing, and he made a mistake of preaching violently against it. Villagers would tolerate that only in one whom they really respected or loved ; and how could they respect or love the rector who—except for his tithe collecting—had ignored them so long ?

It seems likely, however, that the poet-parson did visit regularly the particular flock of which he chose

to be in charge. His writings are full, from beginning to end, of the most vivid and realistic details of cottage and farm life. Probably nobody in all literature has written so microscopically of the cares and joys, the pleasures and vices, of the humble poor. Picture after picture is limned, the features of which are obviously drawn from shrewd and sympathetic observation. The colours are often lurid, but the brighter hues are not lacking ; and always there is the obvious presentment of truth. It seems impossible that the writer should not have been a constant visitor among these poor, of whom he loved to write. He seems to have been more in sympathy with them than with the gentry and the farmers, though his sympathy did not blind him to the crass ignorance and low morals prevailing in the countryside. There is a sort of tense indignation underlying some of his descriptions of the rustic's sufferings ; and it doubtless needed considerable courage on his part, as a country parson, to write what must have given dire offence to some of the neighbouring squires and farmers :—

Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains,
Because the Muses never felt their pains :
They boast their peasants' pipes ; but peasants now
Resign their pipes and plod behind the plough ;

I grant indeed that fields and flocks have charms
For him that grazes and for him that farms ;
But when amid such pleasing scenes I trace
The poor laborious natives of the place,
And see the mid-day sun, with fervid ray,
On their bare heads and dewy temples play ;
While some, with feebler heads and fainter hearts,
Deplore their fortune, yet sustain their parts :
Then shall I dare these real ills to hide
In tinsel wrappings of poetic pride ?

III

Of Crabbe's art, apart from his ministerial work, it is easier to write. He uses always the Popian couplet, and uses it with skill, for his verses are seldom monotonous. His work is very uneven ; his usual homely chatty style is interspersed with occasional lines of beauty and dignity, which again may be followed by doggerel bathos. Yet throughout he always succeeds in bringing home his point. And shrewd flashes of humour brighten the homeliest passages. Here, for instance, is a description of the rustics' handwriting in the marriage register, as compared with the newly-married squire's and his lady's :—

The bridegroom's letters stand in row above,
Tapering yet stout, like pine-trees in his grove ;
While free and fine the bride's appear below,
As light and slender as her jasmynes grow.
Mark now in what confusion, stoop or stand,
The crooked scrawls of many a clownish hand ;
Now out, now in, they droop, they fall, they rise,
Like raw recruits drawn forth for exercise ;
Ere yet reform'd and modelled by the drill,
The free-born legs stand striding as they will.
Much have I tried to guide the fist along,
But still the blunderers placed their blottings wrong :
Behold these marks uncouth ! how strange that men,
Who guide the plough, should fail to guide the pen :
For half a mile, the furrows even lie ;
For half an inch the letters stand awry.

And here is a description of an orthodox vicar :—

" What is a Church ? "—" A flock," our vicar cries,
Whom bishops govern and whom priests advise ;
Wherein are various states and due degrees,
The bench for honour and the stall for ease ;
That ease be mine, which, after all his cares,
The pious, peaceful prebendary shares."

One who can write like this will seldom be dull reading !

Few poets can excel Crabbe in the faithful description of certain aspects of Nature. Pope and his school wrote in their libraries of Nature ; but Crabbe (who in this is introductory to Wordsworth) wrote vividly, as a genuine countryman, of scenes which were stamped upon his very heart and brain. Witness these lines of a desolate East Anglian landscape :—

Lo ! where the heath, with withering brake grown o'er,
Lends the light turf that warms the neighbouring poor ;
From thence a length of burning sand appears,
Where the thin harvest waves its wither'd ears ;
Rank weeds, that every care and art defy,
Reign o'er the land, and rob the blighted rye :
There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,
And to the ragged infant threaten war ;
There poppies nodding, mock the hope of toil ;
There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil ;
Hardy and high, above the slender sheaf,
The slimy mallow waves her silky leaf ;
O'er the young shoot the charlock throws a shade,
And clasping tares cling round the sickly blade ;
With mingled tints the rocky coasts abound,
And a sad splendour vainly shines around.

IV

But it is, of course, as a teller of tales that Crabbe really excels. His *Tales* are his most readable volume. He has the gift of portraying character in a few vivid lines. Witness this picture of a dour Puritan :—

Grave Jonas Kindred, Sybil Kindred's sire,
Was six feet high, and look'd six inches higher ;
Erect, morose, determined, solemn, slow,
Who knew the man, could never cease to know ;
His faithful spouse, when Jonas was not by,
Had a firm presence and a steady eye ;
But with her husband dropp'd her look and tone,
And Jonas ruled unquestion'd and alone,

And here is a sketch of a farmer's daughter who comes home after being at a town school :—

To Farmer Moss, in Langar Vale, came down
His only daughter, from her school in town ;
A tender, timid maid ! who knew not how
To pass a pig-stye, or to face a cow ;
Smiling she came, with pretty talents graced,
A fair complexion, and a slender waist.

In those few lines is defined the whole tragic problem of the tale—how this town maid can face uncongenial work in home and farm, and uncongenial marriage with a country clown.

Or here, again, is a vivid description of a ne'er-do-weel :—

With spirit high John learn'd the world to brave,
And in both senses was a ready knave ;
Knave as of old, obedient, keen, and quick,
Knave as at present, skill'd to shift and trick ;
Some humble part of many trades he caught,
He for the builder and the painter wrought ;
For serving-maids on secret errands ran,
The waiter's helper, and the hostler's man ;
And when he chanced (oft chanced he) place to lose,
His varying genius shone in blacking shoes :
A midnight fisher, by the pond he stood,
Assistant-poacher, he o'erlooked the wood ;
At an election John's impartial mind
Was to no cause nor candidate confined ;
To all in turn he full allegiance swore,
And in his hat the various badges bore :
His liberal soul with every sect agreed,
Unheard their reasons, he received their creed ;
At church he deign's the organ-pipes to fill,
And at the meeting sang both loud and shrill.

Crabbe's knowledge of human nature, and the sureness of analysis, gives interest to the simplest of his stories. The blemish which tends to spoil their reading is the almost constant gloom which underlies them,

It is the dark side of life, and the shady side of character, which draws forth his skill the best. Hazlitt, in his *Spirit of the Age*, calls him a "sickly, a querulous, a uniformly dissatisfied poet," to whom "the world is one vast infirmary; the hill of Parnassus is a penitentiary, of which our author is the overseer. To read him is a penance, yet we read on!"

This (though there is truth in it) is gross exaggeration, and obviously so, for we could not "read on," if Crabbe's poetry were so uniformly miserable. If Crabbe dwells much, and chiefly, on sordid life and sordid character, he can also draw brighter scenes, and write of brave hearts and loving characters. It is true that he can picture, as no other can, the quarrelling slum, the filthy hovel, the degradation of the vicious poor, the squalor of neglected children, and the misery of youthful vice. But he can also draw, and with as vivid a pen, the cosy cottage of the industrious, with its wall pictures, its cuckoo-clock, its little shelf of treasured books, its illustrated Bible, and its happy Sunday evening gathering.

As an excellent example of Crabbe's art we may take *The Brothers*, a charming tale of humble life which illustrates both his shrewd analysis of character and his tendency to melancholy.

George Fletcher was an adventurous, careless, generous fellow who took to his father's calling, the sea, as a duck to water. His brother Isaac, a weakling, as slow and careful as George was quick and careless, gained a poor living on shore. The sailor hired a house for his brother, and for years sent him his earnings on the understanding that he might come home at any time and find a welcome. War broke out; and George,

resisting Isaac's persuasions to desert, went to sea with the fleet.

Isaac, farewell ! do wipe that doleful eye ;
 Crying we came, and groaning we may die.
 Let us do something 'twixt the groan and cry :
 And hear me, brother, whether pay or prize,
 One half to thee I give and I devise ;
 For thou hast oft occasion for the a'd
 Of learn'd physicians, and they will be paid :
 Their wives and children men support, at sea,
 And thou, my lad, art wife and child to me :
 Farewell !—I go where hope and honour call,
 Nor does it follow that who fights must fall.

By close attention to those greater than himself Isaac began to get on in his town ; and, moreover, married a maid with a stocking full of savings. The war lasted some years, during which George's wages and prize-money were sent home to his brother ; nor did Isaac shrink from implying in his letters to George that he was still a poor man glad of help.

In time George was invalided with the loss of a leg ; and, now a useless hulk, looked forward to that sheltering home which he felt sure his brother would gladly give. But he did not know his brother's nature. It was a sore blow to Isaac and his wife, now people of some little standing, when the pensioner came, with unquestioning confidence, to share their hearth.

The vulgar pipe was to the wife offence,
 The frequent grog to Isaac an expense ;
 Would friends like hers, she question'd, choose to come,
 Where clouds of poison'd fume defil'd a room ?
 This could their lady-friend, and Burgess Steel
 (Teased with his worship's asthma), bear to feel ?
 Could they associate or converse with him—
 A loud, rough sailor, with a timber limb ?

Little by little Isaac's protestations of affection cooled, the old seaman's yarns were no longer listened

to with deference, he was slighted and ignored, dismissed to the kitchen and then to the loft. Chafing under this treatment, George at last applied to the parish for aid, which was refused on the grounds that he had a wealthy brother. The only drop of comfort in his bitter cup was the affection of his little nephew who :—

Would listen long, and would contend with sleep,
To hear the woes and wonders of the deep ;
Till the fond mother cried—"that man will teach
The foolish boy his loud and boisterous speech."
So judged the father, and the boy was taught
To shun the uncle, whom his love had sought.

At last the old man fell sick, and lay alone for long hours in his loft, fed only upon castaway scraps of food, except when his little nephew crept up to the loft with dainties bought with his own pocket-money. One day his father found the little fellow at the door,

And cried, " Away ! How ! Brother, I'm surprised,
That one so old can be so ill advised :
Let him not dare to visit you again,
Your cursed stories will disturb his brain ;
Is it not vile to court a foolish boy,
Your own absurd narrations to enjoy ?
What ! sullen !—ha ! George Fletcher ! you shall see,
Pro: d as you are, your bread depends on me ! "

But the boy still persisted, his heart grieved with shame and pity. At last one night, after going to bed, he crept up in the dark again, and again was caught at the door.

The careful father caught him in the fact,
And cried,— " You serpent ! is it thus you act ?
Back to your mother ! "—and with hasty blow,
He sent th' indignant boy to grieve below ;
Then at the door an angry speech began—
" Is this your conduct ?—is it thus you plan ?

Seduce my child, and make my house a scene
Of vile dispute—what is it that you mean ?—
George, are you dumb ? do learn to know your friends,
And think awhile on whom your bread depends :
What ! not a word ? be thankful I am cool—
But, sir, beware, nor longer play the fool ;
Come ! brother, come ! what is it that you seek
By this rebellion ?—Speak, you villain, speak !—
Weeping ! I warrant—sorrow makes you dumb :
I'll ope your mouth, impostor ! if I come :
Let me approach—I'll shake you from your bed,
You stubborn dog—Oh God ! my brother's dead ! ”

It would be hard to find in all literature a more poignant picture of a broken heart than this sketch of the old seaman, himself so generous and open-hearted, fretting himself to death under ingratitude and avarice. If at first sight the picture seems one of unrelieved gloom, let us remember the genial generosity and openness of the sailor, the loving affection of the little lad, and (we may add) the repentance, though tardy, of the brother who, without realising it, had been led step by step into selfish and heartless conduct.

Crabbe was a writer much admired by his contemporaries ; then for three generations after death his lustre waned. But his readers and admirers are again on the increase ; and it seems as if ere long he would come to his own again. If he does, let this be the crown of his fame—that more than any writer before or since, he entered with sincere and affectionate sympathy into the lives and hearts of the poor.

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

I

Childhood and Cambridge—Rapid success as a politician—Conversion—Efforts for reformation of morals and for abolition of Slave-trade—Evils of the trade—Wilberforce an excellent Parliamentary leader against it—Opposition, and prolonged labours—His friendship with Hannah More—His personal piety and austerity—Concern at the state of English religion—Marriage and publication of *Practical Christianity*—Anti-slavery efforts successful at last.

WHILST the Evangelical and Oxford Movements were confessedly complementary of one another, and whilst it would be perhaps invidious to seek to say which movement has had the wider or most lasting effect, there is no doubt that the Evangelical leaders of the eighteenth century loom larger in the English imagination than the Tractarian leaders of the nineteenth. The reason for this seems to be, that whilst the Tractarian teachers were largely divines who worked quietly with the pen in their college circles or their country livings, the Evangelical leaders were more before the minds of their contemporaries as great preachers or hymn writers or philanthropists. If we admit, on the one hand, that Keble is better known through his poetry than Cowper is, it must be acknowledged, on the other hand, that the names of John Newton, William Wilberforce and John Wesley are better known to the man in the street to-day than are those of Pusey and Newman and Froude.

After Wesley, William Wilberforce is probably the most prominent of the Evangelicals in popular imagination, by reason of his connection with the abolition of the Slave Trade.

He was born in 1759, at Hull, the son of a merchant of an ancient Yorkshire family, who bequeathed him a large fortune. As a child William was feeble and undersized, with weak eyesight and a constitution which caused him trouble all his life; but these defects were more than balanced by rich mental endowments.

At seven years of age he went to the local grammar school, attending as a day-boy for two years. Then his father died, and he was sent to live with an uncle at Wimbledon, where he attended a private school for two more years. Gradually he became stronger and more active, though always somewhat frail.

At Wimbledon he came under strong religious influences. No pains had been taken at home over his religious education, his mother being what he once described as "an Archbishop Tillotson Christian!" His aunt, however, associated with some of the early Methodists, and was an admirer of Whitefield's preaching. Alarmed at her influence over the boy, his mother took him back to Hull, when he was twelve years old, and sought to stifle his religious feelings by a life of gaiety and amusements. As a grandson of one of the principal citizens, he was invited everywhere, and the possession of a beautiful singing voice and winning manners added to the boy's popularity. Even at Pocklington School, where he now attended, the masters allowed him to work or not as he liked, and frequently to visit the neighbouring gentry.

At the age of seventeen he was sent to St. John's

College, Cambridge. Here he found himself in a hard-drinking, licentious set, who were not to his taste, and whose vices, though he shared some of their pleasures, he did not imitate. At the end of a year he was able to shake off these doubtful friends, and became the centre of a circle with higher aims and living, with whom his wealth, hospitality, and wit made him very popular. He lived the life of a self-respecting fashionable youth, enjoying the pleasures of society to the full, but never degrading himself. And that he was far from thoughtless was proved by the fact that when the time came for him to take his degree he refused to sign assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles until he had had time to study their meaning and to make sure that he approved of them.

Before he left Cambridge he had already decided to enter political life, and at once, on leaving the University, began to canvass as Parliamentary candidate for Hull, his native town. He gained confidence for this task by addressing small gatherings of Hull freemen at public-house suppers in London, and spent much of his time in frequenting the gallery of the House of Commons. Here he struck up a warm friendship with an old Cambridge acquaintance, William Pitt, who was also serving his political apprenticeship.

In spite of his youth (he was only just twenty) and the opposition of two local magnates, Lord Rockingham and Sir George Savile, in the Hull contest, his personal influence with his fellow-townsmen and his independent character brought him to the top of the poll with more votes than his two opponents numbered together. This election cost him £8000. The single vote of a resident was rewarded, by the custom of those days, by a donation of two guineas; whilst four guineas

were given to a "plumper," and the votes of freemen who travelled from London cost, with expenses, £10 each!

His success secured him a great reception in London. He was elected member of the leading clubs, where he met men like Fox, Sheridan, and George Selwyn—in short, the fashion and wit of the day. He chiefly used, however, a small select club frequented by about twenty-five young politicians, University men, of whom Pitt was a leading figure. Both Pitt and Wilberforce dropped the habit of gaming, then prevalent in every club, when they saw its danger to themselves and its ruinous results on others.

Wilberforce attended closely to his Parliamentary duties, and by the time that Pitt entered the Commons two years later as member for Appleby, his eloquence and sincerity were already beginning to attract attention in the House. This was a dangerous time for the young man's character. His brilliance, his intellectual powers, his wealth and popularity, his musical gifts and a great gift of mimicry all combined to tempt him to a dissipated or purely ambitious career in an age when hard living and hard drinking were the rule in political and literary circles alike.

By the close of 1783 Pitt, in spite of his extreme youth (he was but twenty-four!) had become Prime Minister, and, undeterred by the derisive and virulent opposition of Fox and his party or by frequent defeats in the House, was able to maintain his position until Parliament was dissolved. The elections went triumphantly in his favour. The feeling of the country was overwhelmingly with the young Minister, showing itself in many loyal addresses to the King. But Yorkshire, to Pitt's anxiety, had not yet definitely declared itself, and Wilberforce went thither to try

to influence the county in his friend's favour. An immense meeting of freeholders in the Castle Yard at York was addressed by the chief local leaders on both the Whig and Tory sides ; and whilst the issue was still in the balance, Wilberforce delivered a masterly speech which had an extraordinary effect upon the assembled crowds. Not only did it further Pitt's cause, but it so gained the affection and admiration of his hearers that, whilst he was yet speaking, the freeholders cried, " We'll have this man for our county member ! " A week later he was elected again for Hull ; and six days after the Hull election, he was elected for Yorkshire, the premier county of England.

As yet, the young politician was more interested in politics than in religion ; but this was to be changed. When twenty-five years of age, he made a continental trip with Isaac Milner, a young clergyman who was afterwards Dean of Carlisle. A passing discussion upon Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion* led to many long talks by the two friends upon religious subjects. Wilberforce's interest and conscience were stirred. That winter he found himself uneasy in the frivolous gaiety of London society ; and the next summer he travelled again with Milner, reading Greek Testament with him.

During the following winter he became profoundly miserable about his spiritual condition, and spent long hours, almost daily, in Bible-reading, prayer, and longing for salvation. In his diary he wrote, under Sunday, November 27th :—

Up at six—devotions half-an-hour—Pascal three-quarters—Butler three-quarters—church—read the

Bible, too ramblingly, for an hour—heard Butler, but not attentively, two hours—meditated twenty minutes—hope I was more attentive at church than usual, but serious thoughts vanished the moment I went out of it, and very strong feelings when I went to bed ; God turn them to account, and in any way bring me to myself. I have been thinking I have been doing well by living alone, and reading generally on religious subjects ; I must awake to my dangerous state, and never be at rest until I have made my peace with God. My heart is so hard, my blindness is so great, that I cannot get a due hatred of sin, though I see I am all corrupt, and blinded to the perception of spiritual things.

At last he consulted John Newton, then in great vogue as a spiritual director, about the state of his soul. Newton, now an old man, encouraged the young politician, telling him that he had always entertained hopes of his conversion, and sending him away in a humble and more tranquil state of mind. A fortnight later, Christmas Eve, he was longing to receive the Blessed Sacrament on the morrow ; but dared not, when the day came. However, the soul which sought peace with such earnest and persevering effort could not fail finally to win it ; and on the next Good Friday he made his first Communion, and entered upon a new joy and hope.

It was as an altered man that he now attended the House of Commons. His conversion was no half-hearted matter ; and his one desire now was to use all his influence and gifts for the furtherance of God's kingdom on earth. He confided his change of feelings to his friend Pitt, who listened kindly but without real

sympathy. Henceforth he determined to allot his time with the utmost strictness. In his diary he enters his resolve "to endeavour from this moment to amend my plan for time, and to take account of it—to begin to-morrow. I hope to live more than heretofore to God's glory, and my fellow creatures' good, and to keep my heart more diligently." On his twenty-seventh birthday he wrote :—

What reason have I for humiliation and gratitude !
May God, for Christ's sake, increase my desire to acquire the Christian temper and live the Christian life, and enable me to carry this desire into execution.
A few days later he wrote :—

I am just returned from receiving the Sacrament. I was enabled to be earnest in prayer, and to be contrite and humble under a sense of my own unworthiness, and of the infinite mercy of God in Christ. I hope that I desire from my heart to lead henceforth a life more worthy of the Christian profession. May it be my meat and drink to do the will of God, my Father.

He set himself especially to maintain communion with God in the midst of society or Parliamentary business, and to seek every opportunity of helping Godward his family, his friends, his constituents. And his daily Scripture studies were long and severe.

The irreligion and unbelief, coupled with immorality and intemperance, which were prevalent in the England of his day had now become a constant pain to him ; and finally, after much prayer and thought, he determined to start a society for the reformation of morals. His methods were tactful and wise. He contrived that a Royal Proclamation should be issued

against the vices of the age—the profanation of Sunday, swearing, drunkenness, licentious publications and similar evils ; and whilst the proclamation was still fresh in men's minds, the Association was launched.

Wilberforce canvassed unweariedly to enlist the sympathy of the bishops and of prominent laymen in the work. On the whole, he was well supported ; but not always. “ So you wish, young man,” said a nobleman whose house he visited, “ to be a reformer of men's morals. Look, then, and see there what is the end of such reformers ; ” and as he spoke, he pointed to a picture of the Crucifixion—an argument (Wilberforce's biographer says) which was hardly likely to discourage a Christian !

II

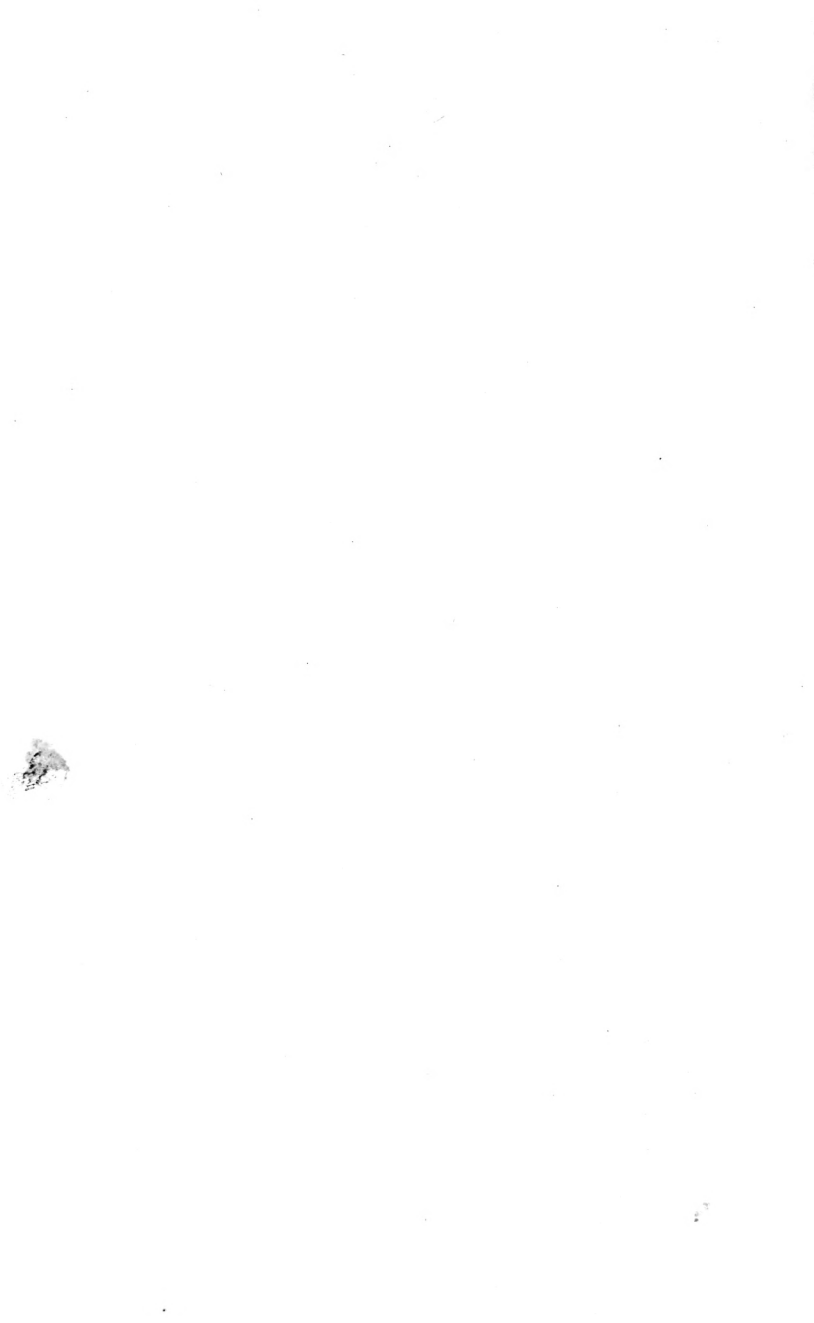
This was in 1787. In the same year he was led to devote himself publicly to the cause which was to make his name famous—the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

For some time the iniquities of the Slave Trade had exercised the minds of many good Englishmen, and indeed, they might well do so. “ The horrors of the trade could hardly be exaggerated. Ships built for the purpose were employed, in which the allowance of room for a slave was five feet and a half in length by one foot four inches in breadth. The extreme height between decks was five feet eight inches, but this was occupied by shelves, upon which the slaves were packed. Sixteen hours a day they remained below, chained to the deck, fed upon a pint of water and two feeds of horse beans. Such conditions of life, for weeks together, in the tropics, not being conducive to health,



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they were brought up and forced to jump upon the deck, under the influence of the whip, for the sake of exercise. If any difficulty arose, they were tossed overboard without scruple, and English law courts held underwriters answerable for such loss, as arising from the natural perils of the sea. No charge of murder, or even manslaughter, was ever dreamt of.”¹

A few years before a Mr. Ramsay, who had lived for a time at St. Kitt’s, first as a naval surgeon, and then as a clergyman, spoke and wrote, on his return to England, about the gross cruelty practised on the slaves. Granville Sharp and his friends set to work to collect evidence in the matter, and in 1786 Mr. Clarkson published a prize essay upon the subject. In the following year Sir Charles Middleton, M.P. for Rochester, who had known Ramsay in the tropics, begged Wilberforce to undertake the cause in Parliament.

The choice was a wise one, not only because of Wilberforce’s wealth and popularity and his important position as member for England’s greatest county, but because he wielded a very real influence in the House of Commons. No member was more respected than he, and few were listened to more readily.

There were several reasons for this. In the first place, it was universally recognised that he—perhaps alone in the House—was above party feelings. From his entry into Parliament he had made it his general rule to support the existing government whenever he conscientiously could; and at the same time he kept himself free to attack, with all his force, any measure of which he disapproved. Not even his close friendship with Pitt led him to swerve from this independent attitude; and though he found it painful to oppose

¹ J. F. Bright’s *History of England*.

his friend, he did not hesitate to do so when conscience bade, as when, for instance, Pitt proposed to increase the income of the Prince of Wales, a measure which Wilberforce stoutly opposed. This independence cost Wilberforce many an inward and anguished struggle with the promptings of natural ambition, but it gave him great power in the Commons.

Then, too, he was a born orator, possessed not only of a powerful eloquence but of a perfect elocution and winning voice. After the famous York meeting Boswell, describing the way in which this frail youth swayed the multitude, wrote to a friend, "I saw what seemed a mere shrimp mount upon the table; but as I listened, he grew, and grew, until the shrimp became a whale." Another eyewitness says that the weather was so boisterous that it seemed as if the speaker's slight frame could not possibly make headway against it. The yard too was so crowded that the other speakers, some of them of great physical power, were hardly audible. Yet Wilberforce was heard by the whole crowd, and by his grace and eloquence held them bound for an hour. Pitt himself said in later years, "Of all men I ever knew, Wilberforce has the greatest natural eloquence."

III

Such, then, was the champion to whom the cause of the abolition of the Slave Trade was now entrusted. Though he felt his unworthiness for the task, it was altogether to his liking. At the age of fourteen, he had written a letter to a York paper against the traffic in human flesh; and for some years before, speaking on the subject in public, he had been collecting accurate

information about it from African merchants and others. "God Almighty," he said at this time, "has set before me two great objects—the suppression of the slave trade, and the reformation of manners."

A society was formed to further the cause, and was largely backed by the clergy, whilst Pitt expressed his warm approval and readiness to help. So it was that, early in 1787, all friends of the cause were full of hope, and eager for their leader to introduce a motion in the House of Commons.

But clouds quickly gathered, and in the face of growing opposition it soon became clear to Wilberforce that he must adopt cautious tactics. It was useless to attack a system which had such deep roots as the Slave Trade, and involved vast vested interests, unless there was a great mass of reliable information to draw upon. Pitt therefore, as an initiatory measure, summoned the Privy Council to examine the condition of our commercial intercourse with Africa.

Then Wilberforce had a dangerous illness. Upon what he and his friends conceived to be his deathbed, he sent for Pitt, and obtained from him a promise to undertake the interests of the Abolition cause. Accordingly, supported by Fox and Burke, both warm advocates of the cause, Pitt announced to the Commons that early in the next session he would move a resolution binding the House to consider the Slave Trade question. Meanwhile some of Wilberforce's supporters, roused by the personal inspection of a slave ship then fitting out in the Thames, carried a Bill through both Houses for some mitigation of the suffering of slaves on board ship.

Wilberforce recovered, and henceforth gave practically his whole time and strength to "slave business,"

as he calls it in his diary. This was made necessary by the steady growth of a bitter opposition. His opponents, by pamphlets and meetings, dinned into the ears of the public that the checking of the trade would bring ruin not only upon a large class of British traders but also upon the nation's commerce at large ; whilst hints of coming insurrections and barbarities on the part of negroes were freely spread. " Mr. Wilberforce for negro " was asserted to be the secret watchword in the island of Grenada for a servile revolution. No slander was too bitter for the trade to use in its interests. " I shall expect to read in the newspapers," wrote a friend to Wilberforce, " of your being carbonadoed by West Indian planters, barbecued by African merchants, and eaten by Guinea captains ; but do not be daunted, for—I will write your epitaph."

Wilberforce and his friends, therefore, needed all their energies to collect trustworthy evidence, to provide eyewitnesses, and to influence popular and Parliamentary opinion. Wilberforce found that he must spend eight or nine hours a day on the business, carefully maintaining his long daily devotions the while, and allowing himself but little time even for food. " Food," says a friend at this time, " beyond what is absolutely necessary for his existence, seems quite given up. He has a very slight breakfast, a plain and sparing dinner, and no more that day except some bread about ten o'clock." Once every week the " Slave Committee " dined with him ; Clarkson and others were his constant co-operators (" his white negroes " Pitt laughingly called them !) in selecting and classifying evidence. At an early hour of the day his ante-room was crowded, some of the visitors being generally invited to breakfast. All sorts were gathered

there—Hannah More's wit comparing the room to "Noah's ark, full of beasts, clean and unclean." On one chair would be sitting a Yorkshire constituent, on another a Dissenting minister; whilst an African missionary or a Haytian professor, with a politician or two, might complete the strange collection. It was now that, in order to save his time, Wilberforce got friends to administer his Yorkshire estates for him.

The opposition burst into a flame when Wilberforce announced that on April 2nd, 1789, he would move in the House the entire suppression of the trade; and the unscrupulous arguments and misrepresentations of the merchants were backed up by the evidence of naval officers and globe-trotters who in their travels had seen only the pleasanter side of plantation life, and even described the "merry dancing" on board the slave ships! Their bitterness roused the aged John Wesley to write from his death-bed what was probably his last letter:—

MY DEAR SIR,

Unless the Divine power has raised you up to be an Athanasius contra mundum, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise, in opposing that execrable villany which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils; but if God be for you who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? Oh, be not weary of well-doing. Go on in the name of God, and in the name of His might, till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun,

shall vanish away before it. That He who has guided you from your youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things, is the prayer of,

Dear Sir, your affectionate servant,

JOHN WESLEY.

The motion, when brought before the Commons, was lost by 88 votes to 163.

Disappointed, but nothing daunted, the Abolitionists now set themselves to educate national opinion by appealing through writings and meetings to the people. Pitt, in face of the turmoil roused, had become cautious; the old King was openly hostile; internal strife in St. Domingo and Dominica strengthened the hands of the objectors; and when a motion for gradual Abolition (the idea of complete Abolition being temporarily abandoned) was carried through the lower House in 1792, it was thrown out by the Lords.

IV

Three years before this Wilberforce, then thirty years old, had paid his famous visit to the More sisters at Cowslip Green. There was a striking resemblance in the circumstance and character of the young politician to that of Hannah More. As he had begun public life with a brilliant political success, so she had made a brilliant debut at an early age in the world of letters and found fashionable London at her feet. Both were gifted with wit and an attractive personality, and surrounded by devoted and admiring friends. And both, moved by love of the Saviour, had made the great sacrifice, and renounced all worldly ambition in order to serve God's suffering poor. Both, moreover, had immense influence, not only with their

own Evangelical circle, but also with the fashionable and gay in the outer world.

When Wilberforce paid his visit, Hannah was forty years old. The story of how he roused her and her sisters to undertake a great educational work for the poor of the district has been already told in our chapter on Hannah More. Suffice it to say here that after consultation it was decided that the Misses More should seek to start schools in the various villages round—Wilberforce and his rich banker friend, Henry Thornton, promising to provide the necessary funds. By their magnificent work Hannah and her sisters, in the face of bitter opposition even from the clergy, raised the whole moral and spiritual tone of the countryside. In an amusing letter Wilberforce advises the introduction of a flying preacher into the parish, since their own rector ("the sun") and curate ("the moon") were so seldom seen.

I fear with you nothing can be done in the regular way. But these poor people must not, therefore, be suffered to continue in their present lamentable state of darkness. You know you told me they saw the sun but one day in the year, and even the moon appeared but once a week for an hour or two. The gravitation to Wells was too strong to be resisted. My advice then, is, send for a comet. Whiston had them at command, and John Wesley is not unprovided. Take care, however, that eccentricity is not his only recommendation, and, if possible, see and converse with the man before he is determined on.

It was through Hannah More that Wilberforce became acquainted with the Wesley family. "I

went," he says, " I think in 1786, to see her, and when I came into the room Charles Wesley rose from the table, around which a numerous party sat at tea, and coming towards me, solemnly gave me his blessing. I was scarcely ever more affected. Such was the effect of his manner and appearance, that it altogether upset me, and I burst into tears, unable to restrain myself."

If the heart of William Wilberforce went out towards the best of the Evangelical clergy, their affections in turn must have warmed towards this young man who had so resolutely given up all, and lived a life of such strenuous self-denial, for the Master's service. In spite of his heavy labours, he still spent daily two hours in religious exercises ; and when his birthday or a New Year's Day came round, he would spend it in retirement and with rigorous self-examination, adoration of God's goodness, earnest prayer and renewal of self-dedication ; to the same purpose he would sometimes devote a whole day before a new session of Parliament. To these devotions he added days or seasons of fasting ; his food, indeed, was always of the most sparing, and it is astonishing to find this eighteenth century Evangelical seeking out small ways of asceticism, such as keeping a small pebble in his shoe, to remind him of the things invisible. His diary frequently records attendance at weekday services in London and elsewhere ; and, like Miss More, he made special efforts to bear Christian witness in tactful ways to friends and relations. He invariably wrote a letter to any friend who used bad language in his presence—a habit which he declared never lost him a friend ; whilst many of his acquaintances followed his advice in such matters as the practice of family prayers or

Sunday worship. In addition to all these resolute and courageous habits (more courageous than we realise in these more cultured days) his great generosity regularly devoted to charity a fourth part of his large income.

V

His attitude as a churchman was that of many of the early Evangelicals. The Church was no more divine to him than the sects, yet he had a deep affection and respect for her, and looked upon her as God's chief agent for spreading His kingdom. John Newton and others of the Evangelical clergy wavered between taking Holy Orders and seeking ministry among the Dissenters; and their choice was chiefly determined by their belief that in the Church they would find a wider sphere of usefulness. Wilberforce worked amicably with Dissenters; but he was convinced that, as a matter of fact, the propagation of religion must depend upon the Church. When he urged Hannah More to send for a "comet" for her parish, he was not advising her to introduce Dissent; for the very deadness of the Cheddar district only increased his conviction that where the Church failed in her duty Dissent could not step in to fill the breach.

The spiritual condition of the English Church was, of course, a constant grief to him. On the occasion of his mother's funeral in 1798, he spent a few days in the parish where she was buried, and comments upon the lack of Sunday Churchgoing:—

At church, miserable work. Remnant of Sunday-school, only eight children, and no more in the place. I have seldom seen a more apparently irreligious

place. A shopkeeper said none of the clergy were active or went among the poor.

Twenty years later he entered in his diary :—

Went to Grasmere, where — read a commonplace sermon at a cantering or galloping pace ; he preached last Sunday a sad, trifling sermon on repairing Chester Cathedral ; and before that, one chiefly taken from Hall's on the Princess Charlotte, utterly unintelligible to the bulk of his hearers. He dined with us, and I was sorry to find he already knew Cooper's Practical Sermons. I hoped they would have approved themselves to him—but, alas ! In the afternoon I walked to two or three cottages, and talked on religion to the people.

His friend Southey, who lived in this district, told him “ Our population is in a deplorable state both as to law and gospel. The magistrates careless to the last degree ; whilst the clergyman of — has the comprehensive sin of omission to answer for. The next generation I trust will see fewer of these marrying and christening machines.”

At Keswick that year he comments—“ the service coldly performed by the vicar, an easy good-natured man, but I fear a poor creature.” Wherever he went he did his best, by generosity and example, to instil a little more vigour into Church life. At Keswick he encouraged some Churchwomen to continue a Sunday-school they had started ; but the vicar would have nothing to do with the efforts, and in response to Wilberforce's plea for making various religious efforts for the town, only urged lack of co-operation or want of time.

The weaker side of Wilberforce's religion is seen in his extraordinary emphasis, and reliance, upon the state of his own feelings, an attitude which he shared with the other Evangelicals of his day. To his mind, apparently, the Blessed Sacrament conveyed no special gift to the receiver, but was helpful in stirring up devout feelings and as an opportunity for renewed self-dedication. It is startling to find him recording that as he knelt by his mother's deathbed, he was praying, not for her (that would have been too much to expect of the average churchman then, in spite of Dr. Johnson's views on the subject) but that the solemn scene might "work its due effect" upon himself; and to find him writing in a similar strain about his attendance at Pitt's funeral. Yet, when this has been pointed out, it is but fair to add that the motives, as revealed in his diary, of this continual introspection were chiefly unselfish. He was seeking to sanctify himself not for his own sake only, but that he might be a worthier instrument in God's hand for his great work.

VI

But to return from his religion to his life's work. The session of 1792 had closed his first campaign against the Slave Trade, and closed it disastrously. Many whose support had depended upon their feelings rather than upon fixed principles were nauseated with the subject; "I do not imagine," Clark wrote at this time, "that we could meet with twenty persons in Hull at present who would sign a petition, that are not republicans." The excitement of the war with France had made the subject a side-issue; whilst the excesses of the French Revolution had aroused a

timidity as to any vigorous reform, and this timidity branded the Abolition movement as revolutionary.

It was now, therefore, that Wilberforce's religious principles served him well. He was convinced that he was doing God's work, and no opprobrium or apparent failure could daunt his courage or lessen his determination. Further attempts were made in Parliament in 1793, 1797 (in which year he married), 1798 and 1799, but in vain. Revolutionary principles were spreading among the lower classes, and Parliament would run no risks. It was suggested at this time that the number of slaves might be reduced by laying a heavy tax upon their importation to the plantation islands. But Wilberforce pointed out that though negroes had risen in price from £76 to £120 a head they were imported in greater numbers than ever; the trade was too profitable to be checked by a rise in prices.

Wilberforce found some consolation at this time in writing his *Practical Christianity*. This book aimed at contrasting the spirituality of the Gospel message with the laxity of prevalent religion. Published with some doubt on the publisher's part, it was out of print in a few days, and ran to five editions in six months. It served much the same purpose for those days as Law's *Serious Call* had served seventy years before—though the greater intellectual and literary qualities of the earlier book has preserved it long after *Practical Christianity* has passed to the limbo of unread books.

With the opening of the nineteenth century the indomitable philanthropist renewed his assault upon "the trade." But it was not until Pitt's death, in 1806, and the formation of a new Ministry under Fox, that prospects really brightened. In that year resolutions

were carried in the Commons by 100 to 14, declaring the trade to be "contrary to the principles of justice, humanity, and sound policy;" and though Fox's death and again a new Ministry intervened and Royal opposition still made itself felt, a Bill for Abolition of the Slave Trade successfully passed the Lords in 1808, and was carried a few days later through the Commons, amidst great applause, by 283 votes to 16.

This, of course, was not, as is often wrongly supposed, the abolition of slavery itself, but only that of the slave trade. It was hoped that with the importation of slaves forbidden, the existence of slaves would gradually die out. This hope proved false; and Wilberforce had left the House of Commons some years before slavery in British dominions was finally abolished in 1833.

Having completed over thirty years of Parliamentary labour, Wilberforce retired from the heavy burden of his huge Yorkshire constituency in 1812, but continued in the House as member for Bramber. Though this lightened his task somewhat, he was far from having leisure time. His correspondence was voluminous, and he worked assiduously not only for the welfare of his beloved negroes, but for many minor causes such as the righting of injustices, the relief of poverty or distress and the improvement of Sunday. His influence in these matters is shown by the fact that when on one occasion it was proposed to open Parliament on a Monday and he protested against the Sunday travelling which this would involve, Mr. Perceval altered the day.

He was now able, too, to give more time to his children, whose spiritual welfare was very dear to his heart. When he was home, one of them always read

to him whilst he was dressing. One son, Robert Isaac, became in later years the well-known Archdeacon of the East Riding, whilst the younger, Samuel, was the still better known Bishop of Oxford.

Wilberforce's life-long association with the Colonies enlisted his interest in missionary and similar causes. He was greatly interested in the East India Company. He had had a hand in the founding of the C.M.S. and the Bible Society, and was diligent in attending their meetings. His diary for 1812 records the following "May meetings" within a few days—C.M.S., "East India Christianising," African and Asiatic Society, British and Foreign Bible Society, and S.P.C.K. To the committee of this last society he transmitted Dr. Buchanan's scheme for an ecclesiastical establishment in India—the first step which led to the founding of our Indian bishoprics.

Meanwhile his presence in the Commons was very welcome to all who had the highest good of the nation at heart. Over and over again he complains that most of its members (would it even to-day be wholly free of the charge?) took a heathen rather than a Christian point of view. Parliament, for instance, taking its cue from the majority of Anglo-Indians, was convinced that any attempt to Christianise the East must infallibly cost England her dominion there; and if it reluctantly allowed a scanty episcopate in India to minister to British needs, it strenuously resisted anything in the shape of missionary effort. "A dreadful truth it is," Wilberforce wrote to a friend, "that the opinions of nine-tenths, or at least of the vast majority, of the House of Commons would be against any motion which the friends of religion might make." He had more confidence in the nation at

large, and succeeded in rousing many parts of the country to send up petitions to the House urging the enlightenment of our East Indian fellow-subjects. Should Christianity, he and his friends asked with reasonable indignation, be the only religion not tolerated in India? In the same spirit he sent out for some years, at the request of the native King of Hayti, Christian schoolmasters to that country.

Wilberforce's great earnestness must have sometimes made it difficult for him not to lose influence by exaggerating his case or by losing patience and temper in public; but, like Mr. Gladstone later, he was supported against this temptation by his constant habit of recalling the Divine presence, and he never lost his commanding position as a fluent and convincing debater. A fellow-member tells of one occasion when he attacked an unjust opponent.

You know B——'s manner when attacked, his head high, his body drawn up. His tall figure as he sat on the upper bench immediately behind was the taller of the two, even when Wilberforce stood up to speak. But when after speaking for a few minutes Wilberforce turned round to address him amidst the cheers of the House, he seemed like a pigmy in the grasp of a giant. I never saw such a display of moral superiority in my life.

In 1825 he retired from the House. Two years before he had named Mr. Buxton as his successor in the anti-slavery cause. The next few years he spent quietly at his house at Highwood and in visits to his friends; and from 1830 to 1833, the year of his death, he divided between visits to Bath and to members of his family in the Isle of Wight and Maidstone. The

last two months of his life he suffered from distressing weakness, during which he looked forward with courage and humility to his end. "It is the peculiarity," he said, "of the Christian religion, that humility and holiness increase in equal proportions ;" and in his own case it was strikingly so. His thoughts were always much taken up with deep thankfulness to God for all His mercies, which he felt to be so undeserved.

It was surely by no accident or coincidence that as he lay dying, at the age of seventy-three, news came from the Commons (the last public news he received) that the Bill for the Emancipation of Slaves was passing through the House, and that the nation was willing, at no small financial sacrifice, to wipe off the stain of slavery from its dominions. "Thank God!" said he, "that I should have lived to witness a day in which England is willing to give twenty millions sterling for the Abolition of Slavery." So was the old warrior able to sing his *Nunc Dimittis* before he passed to his well-earned rest.

THE END



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